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THROUGH FACTS TO FAITH

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THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS.

MIRACLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

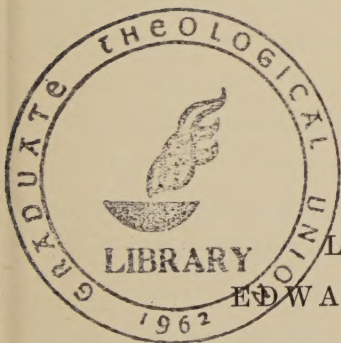
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THROUGH FACTS TO FAITH

Being the
St. Margaret's Lectures for 1912

BY THE
REV. J. M. THOMPSON

FELLOW AND DEAN OF DIVINITY, S. MARY
MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD



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PREFACE

THE substance of this volume was delivered as the 'St. Margaret's Lectures' in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, during Lent, 1912, under the title of 'Miracles and the Christian Faith.'

In the previous year the Lecturer had published a book called *Miracles in the New Testament*, in which, after a critical discussion of the evidence, he suggested the conclusion that the alleged miracles either were not miraculous, or did not happen. The book did not profess to deal with the theological questions in which the problem of miracles is involved. In the few pages which were given to the discussion of such issues, all that could be done was to claim that the rejection of miracles is not incompatible with Christian faith.

In view of the discussion and other incidents to which the book gave rise, it was natural that the opportunity generously afforded by the Vicar of St. Margaret's should be used to develop the theological and constructive side of the argument.

Believing that the case against miracles had been

sufficiently proved, and finding no reason, in the argument of his critics, for withdrawing anything written in the book, the Lecturer, after devoting one hour to a summary of the critical position, spent the rest of his time in stating the positive principles that arise from that criticism, and in applying them to some main aspects of the Christian faith. The treatment was necessarily brief; but it is hoped that a consistent and positive line of thought can be traced throughout.

The lectures have been considerably revised since they were delivered. Were they to be kept back until they need no further improvement, they would never be published at all. It will be kind if those who read them will remember that their publication has to some extent been hurried on by the way in which the previous book was received.

But the time is too critical for extreme caution. Knowing how very many within the Church, clergy as well as laity, welcome the attempt to secure greater theological liberty, one cannot consent to a silence which some of those who are in authority vainly endeavour to impose.

J. M. T.

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MIRACLES

‘I once heard an intelligent Catholic say he would cease to believe, if one could prove a miracle. I always myself believed that miracles required an apology to show for what conceivable reason so real an experience as religion should need them.’—
R. DE BARY, *Franciscan Days of Vigil*, p. 117.

I

MIRACLES

‘BELIEF in miracle,’ says a recent writer, ‘stands simply for the position that, if God is alive, He must reveal Himself in definite acts. A God merely postulated or inferred by the human mind does no miracles ; He remains in silent inaction till man is kind enough to discover Him. The God of religious faith, on the other hand, stirs man out of inaction by His creative acts, and leaves him no rest till he submits himself to God. So with the utmost brevity we may define : miracles are acts of God. To believe in the living God and to believe in miracle are the same thing.’¹

This is a fair and fine statement of that belief in the living God which is at the heart of the old idea of miracles, and which must form the starting-point of any new treatment of the subject. Let us make

¹ Wendland, *Miracles and Christianity*, p. 1.

this quite clear, at the outset of our inquiry. It is solely for the strengthening and enriching of the belief in God; it is simply in order that men may find God more surely and constantly both in the world without them and in the world within, that we are forced to criticise the belief in miracles. That which was fit enough as the expression of a child's trust in God may be unworthy of the faith of a man. We vindicate, we do not attack, that faith, when we try to provide it with a truer method of expression.

Nevertheless, to define miracles simply as 'acts of God' is quite misleading. Our object, in defining a term, must be to give the meaning which the term has commonly borne, not a meaning which conceivably it ought to bear. And it is obvious, as a matter of history, that the controversy about miracles has turned mainly not upon the existence of acts of God, but upon their nature. The word 'miracle' has represented, in the minds of those who have used it, a scientific as well as a religious judgment. They have not been content to say that God acts. They have claimed to identify the acts of God with certain alleged events in the

natural world. Hence the whole controversy. To the purely religious belief, 'miracles are acts of God,' science could raise no objection; but it could not pass without comment the further statement: 'miracles are certain events which are intruded into the course of nature.' Consequently the only kind of definition of 'miracle' which is historically true is one which takes account of both these aspects of the use of the word—not only the religious belief, but also the scientific judgment.

We shall best illustrate this, and at the same time explain the present position of our problem, by following out the main stages in the historical development of the idea of miracles as they are commonly represented.

Miracle was the child of a premature and unhappy union between religion and science. We see a primitive and yet recurrent stage in the history of our race when there is a devout belief in divine activity, but little or no capacity for distinguishing between fact and fiction: that is, there is religion, but not science. No event can be set apart from others as natural (contrasted with supernatural) or normal (contrasted with abnormal). At such a

stage the idea of miracle, which involves just that distinction, simply cannot exist.

But before long a difference begins to be apparent between the recurrent events and the rarities. It is inferred that the former are more likely to occur in the future, the latter less likely. Different kinds of behaviour are adopted towards either class. The age-long contest between science and religion has begun. At this stage religion is closely akin to magic; the difference seems to be that religion is a permanent working agreement between man and God, whereas magic is an occasional method of persuasion or blackmail, whereby certain advantages are extorted from unwilling and perhaps disreputable deities.

Both these methods obtained among the Jews. As regards the Old Testament, it is not necessary to prove—for it is very well known—how high a faith in the creative and overruling power of God existed among the prophets and psalmists whose works have come down to us—a faith which sometimes fell little short of the modern belief in the divinity of Natural Law. We know, too, that the Jewish nation felt itself bound to God by a very close and special covenant,

not of magic, but of religion. At the same time it must not be forgotten how much evidence there is in the historical books of the Old Testament for the survival (side by side with these high ideas) of sorcery, idolatry, and magic. Indeed, knowing how, at a later time, the romances of chivalry obscure the real grossness and misery of the Middle Ages, one cannot help thinking that the degradation and superstition of the common people is but inadequately recorded in chronicles written by priests about the affairs of kings.

In our Lord's time the Old Testament had already become a classic. Its place was largely taken, in popular taste, by eschatological visions and romances. His appeal to it was in the nature of a religious Renaissance for a world wrapped in the dark or fantastic beliefs of demonology and apocalyptic.¹

Nor is the New Testament free from popular superstition and magic. The faith which our Lord Himself held was drawn from all that was finest in

¹ For a convenient summary of contemporary Judaism, v. Hollman, *The Jewish Religion in the Time of Jesus*; for the influence of Oriental religions, v. Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*.

the Old Testament ; and His view of life was so completely centred in personal relationship to God that there could be little place in it for the idea of magic. But the ordinary Galilean, as we see from the Gospels, was in a different position. The very simplicity which saved him from the disillusionment of the Sadducee filled his world with angels and devils, turned dreams into divine interviews, and led him to expect the curing of disease by the magical expulsion of evil spirits. Some important incidents in the Acts bear out the same impression. The position of Simon Magus at Samaria ; the contest between St. Paul and Elymas the sorcerer in Cyprus ; the story of the sons of Sceva, and the description of the burning of books of magic at Ephesus, to the value of ' more than fifty thousand pieces of silver,' are only part of the evidence for a widespread belief in magic and sorcery among those who preached or heard the gospel.

We need not attempt, at this point, to estimate the exact part played by popular superstition in the beginnings of the Christian miracle-stories. What is of greater importance is the fact that the experience of the Church passed through much the

same stages as that of the race. For the Galilean disciples almost anything might happen: many people might work miracles: they were not in themselves a proof of God's presence: nor was it the fact that Christ worked miracles, but the nature of them, that caused surprise. And similarly, in the earliest days of the Church, as we can see from the apostles' preaching in the Acts, the continuance of 'gifts of healing' and 'working of miracles,' made it unnatural to lay special stress upon the miracles of Christ. But by degrees, as the spiritual gifts of the Church died out, and as, under Christological and other influences, a new significance was given to the historical facts of the Gospels, the tendency grew up to attribute a special power and importance to Christ's miracles, and to regard them more and more as evidences of His divinity. The proof of this can be found in the comparative study of the miracle-stories in the Gospels themselves. It culminates in the miracles of the fourth gospel.

In this development we see another illustration of the general contention with which we began. An age which thinks that it sees miracles happen every day, does not find evidential value in any

particular group of miracles. The controversy about miracles did not really begin until the Church drew a distinction between its own experiences and the facts which it recorded in its Gospels.

This point is further illustrated by the attitude of the early Christian apologists. In dealing with Jews, they relied chiefly upon the argument from prophecy. In dealing with Gentiles, they urged the superiority of Jewish to pagan Ethics. The evidential use of miracles was at first subordinate, and only gradually came to the front. We can see why this was so. The argument from miracles was less effective, in dealing with Jewish opponents, than the argument from prophecy. Other religions besides Christianity were thought to work miracles : independent reasons must therefore be found for the superiority of the Christian miracles. And in the Church itself so-called miracles were still being worked on a sufficiently large scale to embarrass the distinctiveness of the Gospel incidents. But during the third and fourth centuries a change comes about : we begin to pass from the primitive into the mediæval atmosphere. 'Miracles are not only far more frequently appealed to, but they have

changed their character. Instead of carefully limited assertions of powers of healing, supported by the personal testimony of great writers, we have stories of all sorts of marvels, related for the most part with little or no attempt to sift them, and with little or no corroboration. Instead of powers residing in the Church as a body, the later miracles are frequently ascribed to eminent persons, as part of the general witness of the popular voice to their sanctity, or as proof of their orthodoxy.¹ We see here a double result of the waning of real spiritual powers in the Church : on the one hand, the Gospel miracles are isolated, and made evidential ; and, on the other, all kinds of legendary marvels tend to grow up round the lives of hermits and saints.²

The ground was thus prepared for the first great formulation of the argument from miracles as the mediæval world knew it, and as it has lasted on until our own day. St. Augustine was right in his philosophy, when he refused to regard nature as a closed and complete system apart from God, or to

¹ Lyttelton, *The Place of Miracles in Religion*, p. 86, comparing Eusebius with Socrates and Sozomen.

² *E.g.* Athanasius's life of St. Antony, and the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius.

divorce the natural from the supernatural. But he was wrong in his criticism—as, indeed, every one was until the seventeenth or eighteenth century—when he assumed that all the miracles alleged in the New Testament happened as they were described. And he was thus driven into the needless difficulty of trying to show that even the extremest miracles (which he assumed really to have happened) would not be contrary to nature, but only to our knowledge of nature.

Certainly (we should say) there is an ultimate sense of the word nature in which it means the will of God: and the will of God cannot produce anything contrary to itself. But are we to suppose that our knowledge of nature is no index to the real character of nature? that there is no improbability in events happening in the real order of nature which go against all our ideas of nature? That is the real question; but it could not be asked in Augustine's time.

Another result of Augustine's position was the distinction, which determined the scope of the whole subsequent controversy, between two kinds of miracles—*mirabilia*, which were thought to be

due to forces inherent in nature, and *miracula*, which were supposed to involve the introduction of new powers from outside. It is obvious how easily this distinction might pass into the modern misconception of the 'natural' as one independent system of laws, and the 'supernatural' as another, and how the old antithesis between *mirabilia*, the work of demons, and *miracula*, the work of God, might become, for a modern mind, a dangerous dualism of the 'laws of nature' and the Providence of God.¹

Such, in fact, was the development that followed; and it is remarkable how the mediæval idea of miracles, with the evidential argument founded on it, has persisted in the Church right down to the present day.

But meanwhile the main stream of the modern spirit has been running in a different channel. Three protests have been made against the mediæval idea of miracles. The first is the religious protest. Faith, says the mystic, needs no external signs. The true miracles are invisible and spiritual. Religious feeling itself knows it is in the presence of

¹ For St. Augustine, ep. Wendland, *op. cit.* p. 56 f.

God. In spite of occasional relapses into a dualistic and miraculous view of the world, Christian mysticism, both before and after the Reformation, has borne its unique testimony of experience to the higher and more primitive idea of God's nature and revelation. And, from Luther onwards, evangelical Christianity has always tended to produce a type of piety to which miracles were at any rate unnecessary. Sometimes the feeling has been stronger. 'The real reason,' says M. Paul Sabatier, for the denial of miracles (he is arguing from the unfairness and partiality which they introduce into God's relations with men), 'the real reason is an entirely religious one: miracles are immoral.'¹ Many of us know very well, from our own experience, how strong a feeling exists against miracles, on some such grounds as these, among people who have no scientific prejudice against them.

The second protest is that of natural science, which has driven out the old idea of miracles from one line of entrenchments after another, and has forced it to confine its claim to an ever-decreasing

¹ *Vie de S. François*, p. 401.

circle of experience—the miracle-stories of Christianity, or of the Bible, or of the New Testament. But the rout could not be stopped there. The third protest followed—that of criticism, or scientific method applied to history. This is the latest stage of the controversy: and our present duty is to show how it enters upon the field, and what is the result of its attack upon the last defences of the mediæval position.

‘The view of miracles,’ says Bishop Lyttelton,¹ ‘which has commonly been taken by apologetic writers in modern times, may fairly be stated thus. Christianity being a special revelation of certain truths which the reason could not discover, or, in other words, a supernatural revelation, needs the confirmation of supernatural events to prove the truth of the revelation. There are indeed other proofs, but the main and fundamental evidence is that of miracles, which have been wrought in order to prove that the extraordinary and incredible doctrines taught by our Lord and His apostles were true, and that they, the preachers of these truths, were divinely commissioned. Some

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 119.

apologists, especially those of the last century, would go so far as to say that nothing but miracles could prove the truth of Christianity, and that miracles had no other object than this.

‘The greatest of all English apologists, Bishop Butler, describes Christianity as “the republication of natural religion,” *i.e.* of certain religious and moral truths, and also as “containing an account of a dispensation of things not discoverable by reason.” . . . Of this revelation, which is itself miraculous, “miracles are the proof,” *i.e.* “the publishers of the revelation proved their commission from” God “by making it appear that He had entrusted them with a power of suspending and changing the general laws of nature.”¹ Rather more than a generation later a similar position was adopted, but with far less caution, by Paley. Revelation, in his sense of the word, is “a message from God, conveying intelligence of a future state of rewards and punishments, and teaching mankind how to prepare themselves for that state”; and “it is inconceivable that a revelation could be

¹ *Analogy*, pt. II. chs. i., ii.

made except by miracles.”¹ . . . In our own day substantially the same view has been taken by one of the acutest of Christian apologetic and moral writers. Mozley rests his defence of miracles on their necessity as the proof of a revelation, and revelation is, in his sense, the communication of “something which we could not know without it.”²

It is not surprising that Bishop Lyttelton criticises these views. And his criticism is the more interesting, since it may be taken as representative of the *Lux Mundi* school, which still dominates orthodox apologetics. ‘We do not assert,’ he says,³ ‘that miracles are necessary to revelation because a supernatural doctrine can only be proved by a supernatural fact, or because revelation is undiscoverable by the reason, and therefore needs the proof of miracles. We do not, indeed, take upon ourselves to assert that miracles are necessary at all to the accomplishment of God’s purposes. We dare not set bounds to His Almighty wisdom, and declare either that miracles cannot have happened, or that

¹ ‘Evidences,’ *Preparatory Considerations*.

² *Bampton Lectures*, p. 5.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 135.

they must have happened. All that we can venture to say is that, having happened, they have revealed to us something of the character and purposes of God.'

The position at which apologetics has at last arrived is here made tolerably clear. In spite of the growing feeling of the religious consciousness that its faith does not need the support of miracles ; in spite of the constant advances of a non-miraculous explanation of phenomena which were once thought to be miraculous ; in spite of the verdict of history, that miracle-stories are a part of the apparatus of many religions at certain stages of their development ; although the *a priori* likelihood of miracles is questioned, and their evidential value denied ;— yet we are not allowed to give them up. And what is the reason ? Because, '*having happened, they have revealed to us something of the character and purposes of God.*' There is the difficulty, which has been dogging our steps throughout the whole controversy. It has always been assumed, and we are still asked to assume, that the events really happened as they are related, *i.e.* as miracles. Indeed, what the apologist is really defending is

not the necessity of believing in miracles, but the necessity of believing in the Bible.

Now this attitude has been rendered possible only by the fact that the third protest against the argument from miracles—the protest of criticism—has been a long time in coming, and is even now only half believed. But it is obvious that, when once this protest is made, every other consideration must stand aside until it has been dealt with. The writer whom I have quoted does not ask us to believe that the miracles happened because they are helpful, but to believe that they are helpful because they happened. If, then, criticism can give good grounds for thinking that they never happened, the main reason for wishing to keep them is abolished. In other writers of the same school this might be differently expressed; more emphasis might be laid on *a priori* arguments for the likelihood of the Christian miracles. But the upshot is the same. The ultimate question is, Did the miracles happen? It is to this point that the controversy has at last come. The critical argument undercuts every other, and, until it has been thoroughly dealt with, we ought not to be asked

to believe that miracles are an essential part of Christianity.

Let us therefore restate, quite briefly, the main heads of the critical case against miracles, and then try to judge how far it has proved its point.

First, however, it must be clearly understood what it is which criticism may be able to prove or to disprove: for this is often misunderstood. It cannot pretend to say whether or not any particular event is an act of God: that is not for history, but for faith. It cannot touch the religious judgment upon the meaning or value of historical facts. It simply asks the question, 'What, as a matter of historical fact, actually happened?' and tries to answer it.

New Testament criticism is part of the study of ecclesiastical history, and is governed by the same presuppositions and the same methods as all other departments of history. It falls into three parts; first, textual criticism, which reconstructs the text of the New Testament which was current in the second or third century A.D.; secondly, literary criticism, which analyses this text into

its original component parts—sources, and authors, and editors; and thirdly, historical criticism, which reconstructs from these materials, treated as evidence, the original facts of the Gospel history. These three parts are inseparable from one another. We cannot cut short our critical inquiry, even if we have shown that a story rests on first-hand evidence: we have still to ask whether the evidence is true—*i.e.* whether it is a correct account of the original facts. This is the right method by which to answer the question, What actually happened? and it is the only method. If it arrives at conclusions, they must be accepted as the best we can get; if it fails to do so, we must be content to remain ignorant.

For our present purpose we may confine ourselves to literary and historical criticism. The evidence is as follows:—

(1) Among the epistles of St. Paul we have authentic letters of the best educated and most active missionary of early Christianity, written within about twenty-five years of the death of our Lord. His lack of interest in the facts of Christ's ministry (he does not even mention the miracles)

was partly due to his personal mysticism, and partly typical of his generation: his advanced Christology illustrates ideas which inevitably reacted upon and coloured the presentation of those facts, when the Gospels came to be written. Even St. Mark is largely affected by this influence. As to his own experiences, St. Paul uses language which is sometimes taken to imply that he and other Christians were in the habit of working miracles. But, in fact, there is no evidence that he ever experienced more than the powers of faith-healing and exorcism—of which nowadays we quite rightly give a non-miraculous explanation.¹

(2) From a comparison of those parts of St. Matthew and St. Luke which they have in common, but which are not taken from St. Mark, we can reconstruct a source or sources containing very

¹ This argument has been misunderstood. It turns mainly upon the meaning of the Greek word *δυνάμεις* (*i.e.* 'powers,' but generally translated 'miracles') in St. Paul's writings and in the New Testament as a whole. And, clearly, what matters for our purpose is not merely to discover what kinds of events or experiences St. Paul thought the word might cover, but what the actual events were to which it was applied. St. Paul may have thought (as his companion St. Luke almost certainly did) that miracles occurred when, as a matter of fact, they did not. *v. Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 17.

early collections of the sayings of Christ, and perhaps representing a primitive type of gospel which was superseded by St. Mark. The only 'cures' described here are a case of exorcism and the healing of a paralytic; and these need not be miraculous.¹

(3) The crux of the evidence is St. Mark. This is the earliest extant gospel, compiled, about thirty years after the death of our Lord, from sources which (in the absence of earlier gospels) we cannot now reconstruct, but which probably included reminiscences of St. Peter and of the Apostolic Circle. It is to sources of this kind that (the evidence suggests) we should attribute the greater number of the miracle-stories in the gospel. Most of them are works of healing, no more miraculous than those of other religions and other times. Several of those which remain can be reasonably explained by the methods ordinarily employed in dealing with ancient documents. Three stories—those of the raising of Jairus's daughter, the feeding of the five thousand, and the walking on the lake—stand rather apart, as resting on early evidence,

¹ *Miracles in the New Testament*, ch. iv.

and yet being, in the form in which they are reported, undeniably miraculous. The first and third of these may not unreasonably be explained as misrepresentations of natural events. The second is less easy of solution, and cannot so readily be accounted for on the ordinary theories of the composition of this gospel.¹

The most scientific way to deal with such a difficulty is to put it aside until we are able to judge, from a consideration of the rest of the evidence, whether the ordinary critical theories are, as a matter of fact, adequate.

(4) In St. Luke's Gospel we have the work of an educated man and a Greek, who professes to have taken some pains to sift the authorities, and who may be supposed to have heard at second, or even at first hand, some parts of the apostolic tradition. Yet for the main bulk, both of the teaching of Jesus, and of the events of His life, St. Luke is dependent upon the two sources that we have already considered—the primitive Collection of Sayings, and the Gospel of St. Mark, which had been written down about ten years before he began his work.

¹ *Miracles in the New Testament*, ch. iii.

Moreover, in the miracle-stories which he takes from these sources, he shows a distinct tendency to enhance the miraculous elements, without fresh evidence. And of the new stories which he introduces—only two of them are necessarily miraculous—one (the raising of the widow's son at Nain) might so easily be a misinterpretation of a natural event, and the other (the healing of Malchus's ear) rests on such poor evidence, and is so generally doubted by conservative critics, that we cannot regard this gospel as contributing anything to the case for miracles.¹

(5) St. Matthew's Gospel was written fifteen or more years after St. Luke's, but followed the same lines, using both St. Mark and the Collection of Sayings. It shows the same tendency to heighten the miraculous element in those stories which are taken over from the earlier gospel. And it includes among its new material, in a collection of stories about St. Peter, two miracles, of which one (the coin in the fish's mouth) is generally regarded as a blunder, and the other (St. Peter's walking on the water) is almost certainly an exaggeration of a non-

¹ *Miracles in the New Testament*, ch. vi.

miraculous incident which occurs twice elsewhere in the Gospels.¹

(6) In the Acts—the second volume of St. Luke's history of the origins of Christianity—there is a very marked contrast between the small proportion of miraculous elements in the second part of the book (which is one of the best attested narratives in the Bible) and the large proportion in the first—a contrast which suggests both that the Jewish atmosphere produced more miracle-stories than did the Greek, and that the nearer we get to the first-hand evidence of competent witnesses, the slighter become the grounds for believing in miracles.

(7) The fourth gospel, written at the end of the first or the beginning of the second century, and embodying some scraps of Synoptic and perhaps Johannine tradition in a mystical treatise on the life of Christ, contains an antithesis, which is not uncommon in Christian experience, between a faith which dispenses with miracles and a tradition which makes them more and more miraculous. A reconciliation is attempted by means of

¹ At the call of St. Peter in Luke v., and at the appearance of the risen Christ to St. Peter and others by the Lake of Galilee in John **xxi.** v. *Miracles in the New Testament*, ch. v.

symbolism : but this can only be done at the expense of the facts : and we are not surprised to find a growing consensus of opinion among students that, whatever the nature of the original incidents, the miracle of Cana and the raising of Lazarus, as they are described in this gospel, need not be taken as literal historical fact.¹

From this survey we bring back, for the solution of the crucial miracles in St. Mark, two suggestions. One is that the heightening of the miraculous element, which can be shown to have taken place in St. Matthew's and St. Luke's editing of St. Mark, may very well have taken place also in St. Mark's editing of his Petrine and Apostolic sources. The other is that symbolism, in the sense of the interpretation of historical narrative in the light of immediate religious and ecclesiastical interests, may have played a more important part in the formation of the Gospels than is generally allowed. Any one who cares to maintain that our method of explaining a particular miracle in St. Mark is still inadequate, has a perfect right to do so. But he will hardly urge this as a serious

¹ *Miracles in the New Testament*, ch. vii.

objection to an argument which is by nature cumulative, *i.e.* does not rely (especially in the meagre state of the evidence) upon its ability to explain every incident, but upon its being able to give a better account of the miracle-stories as a whole than any other hypothesis. And at that we may leave it, confident that, with time and greater historical experience, the critical argument will more and more carry conviction.

There remain two miracle-stories which, on theological grounds, stand in a rather different position from the others. That is to say, more is generally thought to depend upon their acceptance or rejection than upon the acceptance and rejection of other miracles: they are more central for Christian belief. But it does not necessarily follow that the facts about them have been more truly stated: nor do they need any less careful investigation.

The case of the Virgin Birth is a simple one. It is not mentioned in any of our authorities until forty or fifty years after the Resurrection—neither by St. Paul, nor by St. Mark, nor in the Acts, nor in the body of the gospels of St. Matthew or St. Luke. The first chapter of St. Luke, as it at present

stands, contains the miracle : but there are reasons, *e.g.* the inconsistency of the critical verses of this chapter with the rest of the gospel, for thinking that it was not originally so. The first two chapters of St. Matthew admit of no such doubt ; but their account is in many points inconsistent with that of St. Luke, and contains elements which throw great doubt upon its historical character. In view of these facts, the efforts of conservative critics have been directed chiefly to showing, first, that the account of the Nativity in St. Luke is based on an early Jewish tradition, and secondly, that there were reasons why the story of the birth should not have been divulged until seventy or eighty years after the event. The answer to the first contention is that St. Luke was quite capable of throwing his narrative into an archaic form—he seems to have done so in the early chapters of the Acts—but that, in any case, there is no evidence whatever as to the authenticity or truthfulness of the supposed early tradition. The ascription of St. Luke's account to the Blessed Virgin and of St. Matthew's to St. Joseph, which is seriously suggested by some apologists, is a piece of pure guess-work, without

a shadow of evidence. The answer to the second contention is in the negative : no reasonable grounds have ever been alleged why a fact of such great importance should have remained unknown to the Church for seventy or eighty years. Indeed, the critical case against the Virgin Birth is one of the very strongest in the whole controversy.¹

The case of the Resurrection is different. Here we have a strong and persistent tradition in favour of the historicity of certain appearances of the risen Christ to the disciples. But the nature of these appearances has been unmistakably materialised in the course of tradition. And the contradictions in the evidence for the empty tomb are such as can only be explained by the development of some original story of the women's experience, under the influence of theological and evidential tendencies, into the proof of a miraculous bodily resurrection. The upshot of criticism is that the appearances of the risen Lord stand, but that the evidence for the empty tomb is insufficient. There is nothing in this that need disquiet us. Except for those who, like St. Thomas, cannot believe that their Master

¹ Cp. *Miracles in the New Testament*, ch. ix.

is alive unless they have tangible (*i.e.* in this case documentary) proof that His earthly body has not returned to the soil of Palestine, criticism gives us all, and more than all, that we need for faith in the Resurrection. Indeed, it is an enormous relief, to many minds, to be allowed to dissociate their faith in Christ from these materialistic ideas with which it has been so long entangled.¹

Such is the critical argument against the New Testament miracles. It is neither new, nor extravagant, nor eccentric. It merely summarises the observations of several generations of students, and forms a hypothesis as to the conclusion towards which they point—namely, that the alleged miracles either admit of natural explanation, or did not happen as they are described. Unless our materials or our methods radically change, that conclusion will soon be regarded as a truism.

But meanwhile we must not let it be supposed that the critical attack on miracles stands alone, or that our case falls to the ground, unless we can at once give a natural explanation of every miracle-

¹ Cp. *Miracles in the New Testament*, ch. x.; Lake, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

story in the Gospels. Strong as the critical argument is, the general historical argument is far stronger. For, supposing that we maintain the historicity of the New Testament miracles, or even of a few of them, what are we to say about the miracles of the Old Testament? or about the miracles of non-Christian or pre-Christian religions, *e.g.* Buddhism? or about the ecclesiastical miracles of all ages? or about the phenomena of modern spiritualism? Under all these heads there are miracle-stories closely analogous to those of the New Testament; and in later times, as every historian will admit, not a few which rest upon decidedly better evidence than any in the Gospels. Must not whatever is true of the New Testament miracles be, broadly speaking, true of them all? or, conversely, will not the explanations which we offer of the latter be adequate to account for the former also? The only way to resist this argument is to accept the miracles of one's own religion (or one's own sacred book) on trust, to attribute all others to fraud or to the devil, and to refuse to consider historical evidence. The Roman Catholic is, in these matters, more consistent than the

Protestant; for he acknowledges ecclesiastical, and even modern miracles. The Protestant, who denies the miracles of the mediæval saints, and is willing to give up those of Moses or Elijah, finds it much harder to justify his continued belief in the Gospel miracles. In controversy he generally ignores this difficulty altogether. But either attitude is futile in face of the non-Christian miracles: indeed the difficulty which they raise is insoluble, until one admits that all miracle-stories whatsoever may be due to the exaggeration of natural events, or to other similar influences.¹

Against this view, which is adopted as a working hypothesis by all secular historians, it is often urged that the Christian miracles, or at any rate those attributed to Christ, are not analogous to miracles found elsewhere. But we can only discover whether

¹ Our unwillingness and inability to face this problem may be due partly to the prevalent ignorance of the science of Comparative Religion. Until the last few years there was not even a lectureship in this subject at Oxford. Christianity has everything to gain from the study of other religions. It is worth adding, at this point, that more insight into the nature of miracle-stories is to be gained from the reading of religious biography than from the study of formal treatises. If one book may be mentioned as throwing more light upon the subject than any other, it is Dr. Edwin Abbott's study of the death and miracles of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

or not they are so by a critical examination, such as that which we have already summarised. And the conclusion which that examination suggests is that they *are* analogous, in matter, in form, and in origin. It is stated, but generally without instances being given, that the Gospel miracles are obviously superior to others in several respects. Either their didactic value, or their moral superiority, or the economy of power with which they are worked, is held to put them in a class by themselves.¹ I can only say that I have never been able to verify this assertion. The miracles of healing in the Gospels, so far as I can see, are no more and no less beneficent than other miracles of healing. The other miracles are relatively no more and no less significant, for doctrinal or other reasons, than those of some other religions.

Another form of defence is to say that the ordinary methods of history are not applicable to facts so full of spiritual significance as the miracles of Christ. This is a monstrous fallacy. The fact is one thing, the significance of it another. The latter may be much more important than the former. But it

¹ *E.g.* Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 109 f.

matters not at all, when the actual occurrence of facts is in question, what spiritual significance they may possess. If it is claimed that they are facts—that they actually happened—then there is one method, and one method only, of deciding whether the claim is true—viz., by historical inquiry. To suppose otherwise is to set up a Christian standard of truth which is not the same as the standard recognised in every other department of study. It is to deprive Christianity, once and for all, of any claim upon the human reason.¹

But again, objection is raised to the criticism of miracles on the ground of our Lord's unique holiness.

¹ The late Bishop Collins, in an admirable little book on *The Study of Ecclesiastical History*, insists strongly upon the danger of a double standard. 'The Church,' he says, 'is the home of the new spiritual order in the world. But its history is not a separate history; it is realised in the course of history at large. Spiritual facts can no more be isolated than natural facts; for the separation of the spiritual from the natural is as much dualism as the worship of Ahriman and Ormuzd; and dualism is the fundamental heresy, as well in thought as in worship' (p. 4). And again, in words which go to the very centre of our subject: 'Just because ecclesiastical history sees all things in the light of the Incarnation, and from the point of view of the Church of Christ, we must be the more careful to remember that its facts are subject to the same laws as any other facts, that the sequence of cause and effect is not interrupted, but is rather established, because the hand of God is at work in a special degree' (p. 9).

A smaller amount of evidence, it is suggested, might convince us that He worked miracles than that which we should ask in ordinary cases. To the first part of this statement history has no wish to demur. To the second part it raises several objections. We may readily grant that there is both likelihood and evidence for the idea that Christ's healing powers were of an uncommon degree. But this does not excuse us from demanding specially strong evidence for such acts as seem to go beyond common experience, not only in quantity, but also in kind—and such are many of the other alleged miracles. Nor does it allow us to slur over the distinction between natural phenomena and miracles, where we have no evidence from general experience to suggest that we can do so. An increase of saintliness does not, so far as we know, carry with it any increased control over the forces of nature, beyond greater self-mastery, and a heightened influence of will upon will.¹ There is no reason to suppose, *a priori*, that a sinless person could work miracles. Lastly, though

¹ For instance, the Records of the Society for Psychical Research show that the power to produce startling psychical phenomena is quite independent of moral character.

we shall be unwilling to set premature limits to our Lord's natural powers, yet we shall insist that, unless limits can be set somewhere, the apparent likeness of His acts to ours, on the lower levels too (where there is no question of miracles), is illusory, and that His nature is not properly human at all.

Perhaps, however, behind all these objections to the analogy between Christian and non-Christian miracles, lies the feeling that the entry of Christianity into the world was a unique historical event, which might be expected to have unique accompaniments. It is difficult to see how one could judge as to what would or would not be an appropriate accompaniment of a really unique event. But in any case, no amount of singularity in their occasion could remove the alleged miracles from the realm of historical fact, or from the judgment of historical criticism. History knows only one kind of facts. The argument from analogy is based upon the observed similarity between miracle-stories inside and outside Christianity; and no plea whatsoever can exempt or remove these facts from the jurisdiction of historical method.

Such is the case which criticism brings against

the old belief in miracles. I believe it to be unanswerable.

Our next inquiry must therefore be whether the removal of this old belief may not set us free to appreciate the real nature and witness of the acts of Christ, and to build up, on the basis of a new idea, not of miracles, but of Providence, a stronger fabric of Christian faith.

PROVIDENCE

'I may illustrate certain respects in which the modern mind, while it enables us to hold truths of religion even more clearly, compels us to see and understand them differently. Take, for example, the truth of the divine Providence: the old idea of "special providences" was distinctly that even in natural events God acted outside and independently of a course of nature, or of an invariable natural sequence. We can no longer, or shall not much longer be able to hold the truth of providence in that form. And yet I confess that I hold the truth of a universal and particular providence more firmly, and I believe more really, than I ever did before. I believe in a personal providence in nature, because I believe that nature is God, is how God is and acts in those things that we call natural because they are the operation of fixed and invariable laws.'—WILLIAM DU BOSE, *Turning-points in my Life*, p. 85.

II

PROVIDENCE

THE history of the old idea of miracles shows the gradual growth of a misunderstanding, and the disaster to which it leads. The purely religious belief in the activity of God in the world, which meets us in the poetry of the Old Testament, and in the experiences of Christian mystics, degenerated, in popular use, into the half-religious, half-scientific assertion that the acts of God are to be identified with the ignorances of science; that miracles are events occurring within ordinary experience, but incongruous with it; and that they are due to external interferences with the regular course of nature. Such a theory was bound to suffer, sooner or later, at the hands both of science and of history. Indeed, if our estimate of the critical position is correct, it has suffered irretrievably. Nevertheless, the essential faith which underlay the old idea of

miracle remains, and must remain. To deny that God acts in a certain way is not to say that He does not act at all. Religion is free to find God where it will; it is free to add the hypothesis of God to the scientific account of any event: only it may not say that the event, considered as a scientific or historical fact, happened otherwise than science or history have determined. With this caution in mind, let us attempt to restate the faith that underlies the belief in miracles.

It is not because people are particularly devoted to miracles, as such, that they take fright at the attempt to do without them. What they are afraid of is that doing without miracles is somehow the same thing as doing without God. Modern science has stripped off the pleasant mask which used to be upon the face of nature. We know now that, in spite of its promise of future beauty, that face is marked with hard and ugly features. Consequently we are too ready to personify nature apart from God—as the early Christians personified the powers of evil—and to suppose that God's purpose and power are revealed, not in what follows, but in what transgresses natural law;

or, it may be, not in the permanent processes and slow developments of life, but in the rare or sudden eventualities. And so an attack upon miracles is conceived to be an attack upon God.

What a strange misunderstanding it would be of the life of a great man, to suppose that the acts which he does least often, and least deliberately, are the best index to his character! Yet this is how we are asked to interpret God. Obviously we must judge a man's life as a whole. And when we do so, the isolated acts fall into their place in the general scheme of the man's character and purpose, and then, for the first time, begin to explain themselves. Character means habit—a habit of conduct; and freedom means law—obedience to the law of one's highest self.

This is the way in which we are to interpret God. We are to give up, once and for all, the fatal dualism between God and nature. We are not to overlook His presence in the great crises of the world and of man; but we are to look for it most of all in the permanent processes, in the big ruling ideas, in the gradually unfolding purposes of life. And we are to do this with the certainty that we are doing a

religious work, which science can neither attempt nor forbid. Its utmost explanation of the world does without the hypothesis of God ; and for that very reason, though it describes much, it cannot ultimately explain anything. But faith (as it has been said) begins where science leaves off. Faith is at home in the final mysteries of the purpose and meaning of life ; and faith alone finds that it cannot do without God. It was brought up in God's country, and it is never happy or at home until it returns there.

God acts in the world, and is free to act as He will. That is the essence of the belief in miracles ; and that remains untouched by our criticism. All that we have given up is, first, the attempt to limit God's action to certain kinds of event ; and secondly, as a consequence of this, the attempt to prove His activity in such cases, not by spiritual insight, but by scientific and historical evidence—as though one could estimate the beauty of a picture by a chemical analysis of the painted canvas, or discover by a medical examination the state of a man who is in love. That misunderstanding is now gone. We are left free to find God at work

in the world, both in general and in particular, both for the race and for the individual, in any or every event in history. And, as we respect the right of science to describe the historical fact, so science must respect our right to give it a religious interpretation.

We say, then, that God creates the world, and all that is in it. We say that He works in it and through it by processes which we call life, and by methods which we call natural—though these do not as yet fully express either His purpose or Himself. We say—and we say it dogmatically, because we must adopt some solution of a question too big to be discussed here—that the essence of His method is to give freedom, as well as to be free; and that He would rather tolerate the presence of evil in the world than withdraw that gift. We say that He is not limited by anything except by His own will to love the world, and so by the gift of freedom which that will involves: that He acts from moment to moment according to a plan which best furthers that will: and that He allows us an increasingly adequate and trustworthy experience of His working, which we call natural law, through

the use of reason and scientific method. We believe, therefore, that the religious sense is absolutely free to hold that God acts directly upon and through our lives, and to decide in what ways and through what events He acts; but that it has no power to say that any event ever happened contrary to that which science and history determine.

A question of terminology arises here. When faith finds God at work in an event, are we to call it a miracle?

There is an obvious advantage in keeping old names, even when we give them new meanings. It is a recognition of the real continuity of thought underlying successive changes of interpretation. Forms are the last things to change, not the first. And it is a good way in which to recommend new ideas to people who would be unwilling to receive them in a less familiar shape. It is on such grounds, presumably, that Professor Wendland retains the word 'miracle' (German 'Wunder') for a conception which has discarded practically all the associations of the old idea.¹

¹ *Miracles and Christianity*, p. 1.

But sometimes a term carries such strong associations with it that it can hardly be adapted to new meanings. Like the name of a street in which a murder has been committed, it must be changed. The word 'miracle' is of this kind. It is so bound up with a bad philosophy, and with an unhistorical view of history, that it had better be given up. In no other way can we show that we have definitely broken with the old idea of miracle, and committed ourselves to the new.

But if the word 'miracle' be given up, what can we put in its place? There is a quite suitable alternative, the term 'Providence.' It is a good word, and has (on the whole) good associations. It expresses very well God's continuous and active care for the world: for we are misusing the term (and we know it) when we speak of God's Providence apart from God, or appeal to it as an arbitrary power external to our lives—as in Samuel Butler's satirical remark, 'As luck would have it, Providence was on my side.' We speak also—too incautiously, perhaps—of 'special providences,' meaning God's particular acts in the history of nations or in the

lives of individuals ;¹ so that the term is well suited to express both the general and the particular aspects of God's activity. Further—and this is perhaps most important of all—the word suggests the regularity and permanence of God's work, together with the ideas of affection and forethought : it is a good antidote to the sense of something irregular and abnormal which is associated with the word 'miracle.' We will therefore speak in future of the providential, not of the miraculous, action of God in the world.

We have stated our belief in the providential ordering of the world. But several problems remain to be dealt with, before all the bearings of that belief can be clearly seen.

And first we may ask, Does religion really demand a particular as well as a general Providence ? Was the old idea of miracles thus far right, that God concerns Himself with the details, not only with

¹ We must beware of slipping back, through the use of this phrase, into the old false opposition between the special interference which reveals God, and the permanent law which conceals Him.

the outline of things? And, if so, does our restatement preserve that truth?

Now we could, no doubt, conceive God's relation to the world as analogous to that of a man to a machine. We could picture Him as limited to those functions which creation, His handiwork, can perform for Him, and to such interferences as enable it to perform those functions properly. But it is as impossible to worship an immanent God, who is wholly expressed and limited by nature as we know it, as to worship One who stands quite apart and outside. That God should feel at home in nature as it is, is as incredible as that He should be constantly interfering with it, as a man interferes with a badly running machine. The world is not worth living in unless God is free to make it better. It is not worth while for *us* to live in it, unless it is through our free action that He is reforming it. The ultimate issue here does not lie between immanence and transcendence, but between mechanism and freedom.

Consequently the very idea of Providence seems to stand or fall with the possibility of human freedom. And if freedom is once admitted, God's

activity must be conceived as going beyond the outline of things into the details—namely into those separate choices in which man is free. If God works only through nature as a whole, or through humanity no more freely than through the rest of nature, general Providence is enough : but if His will is to work out the salvation of the race through the free choice of the individual, then we shall also speak of particular Providence, in the sense of special examples, exhibited through and for individuals, of the general rules of God's activity.

Our own experience says 'Yes' to this. The consciousness of freedom does, in the religious mind, carry with it the sense of a special relationship to God—a belief that He hinders or helps, that He rewards or punishes, that He directs and controls the individual life. Nor is this belief upset, in practice, by the difficulties which arise from the intermixture of general and particular Providence (when our special case seems to have been lost sight of in the crowd), or from the extravagances of human self-will, or from God's self-limitation to orderly activity (how we should like a real miracle sometimes !), or from the law of sacrifice—the law of

the Cross. Indeed, the fact that our faith survives these shocks is as much a proof that God's purpose is being worked out in our individual lives, as the belief in the existence of God is a proof that God exists.

More difficult problems no doubt arise when we try to define the notion of individuality, or to conceive the real nature of the relationship between God and the individual. But, simply confining ourselves to the religious consciousness, we cannot doubt its verdict—that any high degree of religion postulates a personal, and not merely a representative, dealing of the soul with God, and a particular, and not merely a general, Providence of God in relation to the soul.

But now, if, as we have said, the idea of Providence is implied in the consciousness of freedom, this consciousness itself needs some further analysis.

Suppose that God were free, but not man. Man might either be limited from birth to the exercise of mechanical functions, or he might be adaptable to new situations, and capable of certain developments, but unconsciously, at the will of his Creator, and without any contributory will of his own.

In the former case God would be able to alter a man's position in life only as one alters the position of a piece upon a chessboard, without any possibility of changing it into another piece, or of altering its move. In the latter case there would be no limit to the possible alterations and developments, except the lack of any conscious action on the part of the man himself.

This second case might be thought an adequate account of the facts of life ; but in reality it is no more than a half-truth. A Providence which worked in that way would be equivalent to what we call the 'chance' which determines the birth and education, the opportunities and circumstances, of the individual. It would stand for all the influences which we sum up under the terms heredity and environment, for everything which a man does, or suffers, or is, without a contributory will of his own. Whatever those influences are, and are worth, Providence (on such a view) is, and is worth—no less and no more.

Against such a theory the sense of freedom inevitably protests. It claims that heredity and environment, although of enormous influence upon

our life, do not absolutely determine it; that the subliminal will (if we may call it so) is as subordinate to free volition as the subliminal consciousness is to rational thought. If Providence works only through the volitionless and the unconscious, man knows a better God to worship, namely himself; for he has power—and is conscious of using it—to defy heredity, to turn environment against itself, to out-provide Providence. Consequently, the only view of Providence permanently satisfying to the religious sense is that which says that God works not only upon, but also through and with the individual, using him as a free and conscious agent. He does not merely move the pieces on the board: He enables them to acquire characters and movements of their own. The orderliness of chess is gone: but the board is a real world, and the chessmen have become live people.¹

¹ 'I think that it would be difficult to exaggerate to what an extent that idea pervades the Bible—the idea that God has a purpose; that upon that purpose He is insistent; that He knows His own mind, but that He will only save men through man; that He did not put man into a finished world to enjoy it, but into an unfinished world to complete it, or into a ruined world to restore it: the work of God for man is to be done by man.'—**BISHOP GORE**, in a recent lecture.

Man is greater when he defies than when he follows circumstance. But true freedom is never licence. It consists in obedience to the law of man's proper nature—that is, to the will of God recognised in him. And consequently the religious sense finds in this freedom its closest dependence upon the Providence of God. There is a sense of newness and creativeness in the soul's free defiance of the world which can hardly fail to have its source in the particular activity of God in and through the individual life.

At this point a more difficult question arises. It is, as we have seen, the essence of the idea of Providence that the world should be growing better—that is, that God should bring about new events in it, and that nature and man should gradually reveal Him more and more. Similarly the reality of God's work in my life depends upon its power to create a new character in me—to make me what, without it, I should never have been. And these new elements do, we believe, constantly occur. It therefore becomes of the utmost importance to ascertain what their nature is, and

how they are related to the scientific analysis of the world.

The main point is this: the newness of the event or of the character is real. Yet it is often of such a kind that neither physical science nor psychology can see anything new in it—anything not explicable as the result of its known antecedents. And, in that case, their failure to discover it is no proof that it is not there.

Take, for instance, two cases of recovery from sickness. In one the disease runs a normal course, and the cure is due, from the doctor's point of view, to factors present in the case throughout, easily calculated, and well understood. In the other, certain mysterious symptoms suddenly disappear, or the patient shows a quite unexpected vitality, and falsifies all the expectations of the doctor. It is only a case of this second kind which would readily give rise to the idea of a miracle, in the old sense of the word. But there is really no rational ground for this preference. What the degree of God's activity may have been in either case, can only be judged by the religious sense. And it is just as likely, *a priori*, that He was specially at

work in the normal case as in the abnormal. In short, the fact that an event can be adequately explained by science is no bar to its being highly providential. Or, conversely, 'The sequence of cause and effect is not interrupted, but is rather established, because the hand of God is at work in a special degree.'¹ The providential explanation is not in the least inconsistent with the scientific: it simply goes beyond it, or within it.

The same principle holds in the psychological sphere. In a case of conversion, for instance, the psychologist may be able to give a quite adequate account of each successive state of mind, to estimate the causes which led to it, and even to foretell future developments. And yet, as an explanation of the conversion, his account may be entirely beside the point. It may ignore the root of the whole matter—a providential intercourse between God and the soul.

To sum up: just as a natural event may be as well explained as science can explain it, and yet remain a direct act of God, so a state of mind may

¹ Collins, *Study of Ecclesiastical History*, p. 9.

be as well analysed as psychology can analyse it, and yet remain a revelation.

This may seem an austere, or even a paradoxical view, to minds still dominated by the old idea of miracles. They are unwilling to let science analyse things which they have found so sacred. They cannot rid themselves of the feeling that what has been explained has been made common, and that only the mysterious is the divine. But such an attitude inevitably narrows religion more and more: the old mysteries grow fewer every day; and each new filling up of a gap in the scientific explanation of things robs religion of another of its dwindling possessions. If the religious view of the world is to survive at all, it can only do so, not by ignoring science, but by transcending it: not by creeping into the gaps in the scientific view of the world, but by claiming to cover all the ground that science covers, and to do so much more thoroughly. And this claim it has a perfect right to make, in virtue of some such conception of Providence as we have outlined above.

If we wish to picture more exactly the method in which a new event and character comes into being,

without any transgression of natural law, we may have recourse to the analogy of art. Real genius produces quite new effects in music, or painting, or poetry, by a masterly use of old materials. When we hear a familiar piece of music played for the first time by a master, it is, as we say, a 'revelation' to us : but we do not therefore suppose that he is using a new kind of piano. The school-boy and the Academician produce utterly different results with the same box of paints.

In the same way we believe that God's normal method of action in the world is not to create new material, but to make supreme use of the old. He produces nothing out of nature which is not already implicit in nature. He creates no character in man but that which man potentially possesses. The supernatural is nothing but the natural fully grown. Only it cannot grow apart from God.

Two further points are suggested by the analogy of art. Although it is true that genius can show itself in any material, yet it is also true that some materials hinder its expression, and some help it. There is much the same contrast between the lives through which God can act strongly and readily,

and those through which He cannot. Thus conversion is not analogous to birth so much as to awaking from sleep. It sets free the old soul from the sluggishness of sin. It does not create a new one.

And again, a time may come in life, as in art, when a need arises for new methods of expression. And there, too, our analogy helps us : for those new methods are best which develop naturally out of the old ; it is not in the least necessary that they should be revolutionary, in order that they may be new. God is the Great Innovator : but if growing experience tells us that His acts fall within the ordinary sequence of cause and effect, there is no reason why we should ask for another account of Him, or should think this method anything less than the best.

The psychological analysis of conversion, then, does not prevent our regarding it as a direct dealing of God with the soul. Nor is the position altered if the psychologist goes further, and says, ' I can not only explain how your conversion happened, as the result of your past life, but I can also explain why it is that you do not accept my

explanation as final: I can account for the sense of objectivity—the feeling that it comes from outside you—which goes with it.’ This sense of objectivity is certainly an essential part of the experience of conversion. But it does not stand upon a different footing from the rest. There is no need to attribute to it a different origin.

There is, however, a type of criticism which does not stop here. It is not content to explain my conversion, and the sense of objectivity that goes with it, as the result of my personal antecedents. It goes on to suggest that, because they come about in this way, these states of mind are merely fanciful, and therefore (if it is consistent) that the whole religious consciousness—the sense of communion between God and man, and the distinction, within that relationship, of subject and object, self and not self—is purely subjective and (in face of what it feels like) illusory.

Such a view is still able to enlist a considerable amount of popular support. People who have come to acquiesce in the doctrine of the physical Descent of Man still think that religious experiences are somehow discredited if they can be derived through

a natural ancestry. Whereas, in reality, it is just their naturalness, just their congruity with other parts of human nature, which makes us sure that they are valid. There is no gulf fixed between subjective and objective, any more than between natural and supernatural. The supernatural is nothing but the natural fully grown. The objective is nothing but the subjective adequately verified.

No doubt, if a man had thought that God acted upon him entirely 'from outside'—*i.e.* if his definition of God had been simply objective (in idea as well as in language)—the discovery of the subjectivity of his idea of God would endanger his whole religion. He would think that he could have no more certainty that God was there, or was acting at all. But if he had believed (as we have seen that he should do) that God worked through him, and depended upon his free acting and free thinking for the communication of the divine will and thought to the world, then he might without much difficulty accept the idea that, when properly verified, subjectivity is reality, and faith the last word in philosophy. To give a historical account of the

origin and growth of the religious sense is not to detract from its reality or value. To find the ground of the divine being and nature in the human soul is not to belittle, but rather to ennoble, religious experience: it is not to doubt, but to secure as a lasting possession, the presence of God, of which that experience is the proof.

It would seem then that, so long as there is no relapse into determinism—so long as God is free, and man is free in God—it matters very little to the believer in Providence whether the new element, which we have seen to be the essence of God's activity in the world and in the individual, be spoken of as coming 'from without' or 'from within': whether capable or incapable of scientific analysis, it may be equally divine. Nor need it alter the case if the feeling of externality, which is a normal part of the religious consciousness, is itself explained as a product of the life in which it appears. Whatever the circumstances of its birth, it may still be the very gift of God, the utmost step in the path towards Himself that He allows the soul to take. To hold such a view may alter a man's idea of God and of revelation: but it cannot separate

him from God, because it cannot separate him from himself.

Hitherto we have been treating physical and psychical facts as though they stood upon the same footing. But the question may very well be raised, Have we the same reason for thinking that God acts providentially in the physical sphere as in the psychical ?

It is more or less an accident (as we say) that scientific method has been more quickly and thoroughly applied to physical than to psychical phenomena. Yet it is for this cause that we have the impression that matter is 'ruled by law' in a way that mind is not. The impression is one that it would be very difficult to justify. And we must be on our guard here against slipping back into the old identification of the lawless with the divine.

God's freedom, which is (as we have seen) the essence of His Providence, works itself out through the freedom of man. God's activity, then, is to be looked for more in man than in nature apart from man: so far there is no difficulty. But within man himself the case is not so simple. We

find, on the one hand, that man is not really more free in his mind than in his body. The spontaneous and reflex actions of the body have their counterpart in the unconscious and subconscious processes of the mind. Whatever power of initiation or selection man exercises in thought, he also exercises in action. And wherever he acts, there is an opportunity for God to act through him. On the other hand, the freedom of the mind involves much greater possibilities than the freedom of the body. Whatever the exact relation of the one to the other, it will not be disputed that the highest development of the personality as a whole—which is also its closest adaption to God's uses—lies in the supremacy of mind rather than of body. There is plenty of evidence to show that we must not exaggerate this truth. The important part played by physical states, *e.g.* in visions, conversions, and mystical experiences, shows that God does not despise the body. But ultimately 'God is Spirit,' and it is where spirit most thoroughly dominates matter that He is most clearly revealed.

If this is so, we shall expect the evidence for God's providential action in nature to be com-

paratively obscure, and shall scrutinise it with particular care. This scrutiny will not be the same as the evidential examination of the miracle-stories, under the old conditions. For in those cases the presence of God was suspected on wrong grounds, namely the unusual nature of the event itself, not on the score of its value for the religious sense: and some events, which, on the old standard, were thought miraculous, might not, when judged by our new criterion, be considered specially providential. But some such scrutiny remains as necessary as it ever was. For without it we should easily fall into one of two errors—either the old-fashioned confusion of spiritual value with physical oddness, or the pure subjectivity which requires no more proof of God's action than that some individual has regarded a particular event as divine.

This idea of Providence as graded from matter towards Spirit is the chief modification that one ventures to suggest in criticism of Professor Wendland's very valuable treatment of the new idea of miracles.¹ He seems to be so far still under

¹ *Op. cit.* ch. v.

the influence of the old conceptions, that he gives undue prominence to God's acts in nature apart from man. And he is thus led to retain within his definition of miracle (which is in other respects equivalent to our notion of Providence) some element of physical incongruity. There must, he thinks, be something in the actual event which was not contained in its antecedents, and he appears to regard this new element as part of the actual phenomenon, the historical fact. But surely the appearance of a phenomenon which, though it might follow naturally from *other* antecedents, does not follow from the antecedents of the case in which it occurs, is as much a miracle as those events which Wendland elsewhere rejects. The so-called points of transition, in the development of life, from inorganic to organic, or from irrational to rational, which seem to be the cases that he has in mind, are probably not *points* at all. It is our mental clumsiness which conceives them so; just as we make a door by hinging one flat surface on to another, when what we really want is a single sheet of flexible material. If we knew more about the history of the development of life, we should

almost certainly find the supposed points of transition bridged over by a continuous series of forms, which left no need for the intrusion of a new element. Or, if the transitions were due to the occurrence of 'sports,' or strange unprecedented forms of life, this would be due to no more than an unusual grouping together of several antecedents, or an uncommon development of one. There would be no demand in either case for Wendland's hypothesis. The creative originality of the event does not depend upon the existence of a gap in the sequence of cause and effect.

It only remains to say something about the meaning of that 'religious sense,' or 'faith,' upon which we claim to fall back for the discovery (which is also, from God's side, the revelation) of the divine Providence and Personality.

Faith begins in a kind of spiritual sensation, an intuition of the presence of God.¹ But it does not end there. For, in the first place, our faculties

¹ 'Were I indeed to define divinity, I should rather call it a *divine life*, than a *divine science*; it being something rather to be understood by a spiritual sensation, than by any verbal description.'—JOHN SMITH, *Select Discourses*, p. 1.

do not live apart from one another: they are members of a society which we call our personality: and they can only do their work in relation to one another. Thus we have already seen that faith is free to find God where it will, only because it accepts the verdict of reason as to the nature of scientific and historical facts. That is to say, it cannot find God in anything that reason, which is also seeking for God, says is untrue. Similarly it cannot find God in anything which conscience says is wrong. Indeed, this being so, we may, if we please, use faith in a wider sense, and identify it with the co-operation of all the faculties in the search for God.

And, secondly, the final purpose of the whole life and personality is not knowing, but doing; and its state is not passive and receptive, but active and creative. So that faith, too, is an act of will—a committal of one's whole self to God, in order that one may realise the highest possibilities of life for oneself and others.

Faith, when thus conceived, loses the sense of arbitrariness and pure subjectivity which we sometimes attach to it, and stands out as the deliberate

and valid judgment of the whole man about the character of God.

We may end by contrasting the old view of miracles and the new view of Providence in two essential respects. First, the old view assumed that what was scientifically explained could not be a miracle: it thus tended (with the advance of science) to shut God out of the finest parts of human experience. The new view holds that religious faith is free to find God in any part of experience, whether scientifically explained or not. Secondly, the old view assumed that the proof of God's presence in history lay in the extraordinary nature of certain events: it thus set up an antithesis between a supposed objective method of proof, and subjective fancy—between demonstration and faith. The new view denies this antithesis, and holds that religious faith, when rightly guarded, gives the highest assurance of objective truth.

Two principles of the utmost importance thus emerge—the independence of the religious sense, and the validity of the judgment of faith. It remains to be seen whether the substitution of these

two principles for the old idea of miracles affords a basis for a constructive statement of the essential parts of the Christian faith—its reverence for the person of Christ, its doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, and its theory of prayer and sacramental worship.

JESUS

‘ Applichiamo tutto ciò alla distinzione incriminata tra il Cristo della storia e il Cristo della fede. Il Cristo è per se stesso uno, ma può essere considerato come oggetto della storia e come oggetto della fede. Come uomo, la persona di Gesù e le sue azioni esteriori erano apprese per mezzo dell’ esperienza sensibile, e in questo senso egli appartiene alla storia: come Cristo, in quanto cioè unito a Dio in maniera singolarissima e intermediario fra Dio e noi della sua rivelazione e delle sue grazie, non può essere conosciuto che per un lume spirituale e divino, e in questo senso non appartiene alla storia ma alla fede.’—*Il Programma dei Modernisti*, p. 67.

III

JESUS

THE grounds of our criticism of miracles, and the nature of our idea of Providence, have now been sufficiently stated. If our argument is valid, theology, at any rate, is likely to gain rather than to lose by this fresh delimitation of its boundaries on the side of history and science. But what will be the effect upon Christology? That is the question which we have to face next.

Looking back upon our argument, we see that what we have really been suggesting is a truer way of expressing spiritual values. We start from an event—as for instance, a work of healing in the Gospels—upon which the religious mind fixes as being specially significant of God. What matters most in it, not only at that moment, but in all subsequent developments, and in whatever way its

significance may come to be expressed, is its spiritual value, its importance for faith. It is well to remember this even in cases in which (we feel) the event is not worthy of the faith which it supports. The most superstitious relic-worship, the most abject belief in miracles, gets some dignity from the religious faith which it both expresses and obscures. *A fortiori*, in those cases in which the event, even apart from the faith, would have been remarkable.

But when faith expresses its sense of the value of an event by representing that event as a miracle (in the old sense of the word), it not only comes into conflict with history and science, which are themselves other ways of expressing God in the world: it also shows itself unworthy of its own particular work. The development whereby an act of healing, or a conversion, becomes a miracle and a legend takes it further and further away from the actual experience which alone guarantees its spiritual value. Conversely, if the mystics do without miracles, it is certainly not because they undervalue the evidences of God's activity in the world. It is because their experience holds God so

closely and intimately that they have no need to materialise His influence in events external to themselves. They do not find the facts of Christ's ministry less wonderful than others do, but rather more so: only they express their significance differently: events in space and time are to them a symbol or sacrament of spaceless and timeless spiritual realities. For them, all supernaturalism is where God is, in their own experience. They do not look for it in external events, apart from that experience: rather they read it into the events, in virtue of the experience.

Miracles, then, may serve as remembrancer to a forgetful faith, and as a picture-book for one that lacks imagination: they are a useful means of rousing and reviving popular religion of a lower type. But to any high religious experience they are most often a hindrance and a distraction. So we may sum up the case by saying that the critical conclusion, 'Miracles do not happen,' finds a welcome waiting for it in the religious experience, 'Miracles do not matter.' And faith is set free to reconstitute its world with greater sincerity both towards history and towards religion.

Thus far many will be disposed to follow the argument. They will feel that they cannot refuse to apply the ordinary methods of historical criticism to the miracle-stories of the Gospel. They may even admit that the figure of Christ gains by being dissociated from miraculous accompaniments. But they shrink, perhaps not unnaturally, from the extension of this critical and reconstructive method from the circumference to the centre of Christian faith. There can be no doubt that the popular conception of Christ Himself is as miraculous as that of His works of healing. Those who give up the latter console and excuse themselves by falling back upon the former. Whilst surrendering the miraculous acts, they wish to keep the miraculous Agent. Whereas those who retain the former do so because they fear to admit criticism to the latter. This apprehension is not unfounded. The historical person of Christ stands in much the same relation to the Christologies of the Church as His historical acts of healing do to the miracle-stories which grew out of them. The same kind of argument which has led us to the notion of a non-miraculous Providence seems likely to lead us to the idea of a

non-miraculous Incarnation. Nevertheless, we must see how far our principles carry us in this direction. If they are wrong, this crucial experiment will prove it. If they are right, there may be more to gain from this application of them than from any other.

The inquiry which is before us may be put in the form of two questions. First, does criticism give us grounds for regarding the historical core of the Christologies differently from the historical core of the miracle-stories? Were the original facts any nearer to being miraculous in the former case than in the latter? Secondly, is the relation between the facts and the faith the same in both cases? Is it enough that the facts of Christ's person, hitherto regarded as miraculous, should stand in a more or less accidental relation to the new valuation of Him? Or are they the essential and indispensable foundation of the new faith, however non-miraculous it be? In other words, what is the nature of the faith which calls Christ divine? And what is its validity?

It may be asked whether these are questions which can be satisfactorily dealt with by cool reason.

They belong, it may be suggested, to the warm heart of religion, where action comes before analysis, and spiritual sensation before reasoning. Doubtless, the truest knowledge of religion is won, and the best fruits of religion are produced, by those who give themselves up, heart and mind, to a particular church and to a particular gospel. But our faith cannot spread itself simply by the infection of personal enthusiasm. We must be able to express and to commend it in the universal language of reason. Moreover, although the original impetus of enthusiasm may be independent of reason, or even vary inversely with regard to it, yet its continued momentum, whether in the society or in the individual, depends very largely upon its ultimate rationality. We must, then, follow the ordinary methods of reasoning, so far as they will take us ; and it will be well to approach the present subject through some considerations which are common to Christianity and other religions.

There are no psychological facts more interesting than those of conversion. There are no phenomena of history at once so fascinating and so important

as those which attend the origin of new religions. At first, perhaps, we study them impatiently and inattentively. We are offended by the elements of superstition and imposture in them. We are obsessed, it may be, by traditional notions of the uniqueness of one particular group of religious phenomena. But by degrees we begin to compare, as well as to contrast. We find similarities and uniformities among the strange medley of claims and beliefs, of spiritual phenomena and fanaticism, which go to the making of a new cult. In so many cases visions are seen, or voices heard; in so many there is faith-healing, or exorcism, or 'speaking with tongues'; so uniform are some of the features and developments of new religions, that we easily go to the other extreme, and lose the sense of higher and lower, better and worse, in the history of man's 'tendency towards God.' Yet it is only by recognising the uniformities of all religions that we shall come to appreciate the peculiarities of any one at their proper worth.

There is one phenomenon which is common to Christianity, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism, and to many of their derivative sects—veneration for the

Person of a Founder. And, to a greater or lesser extent, in most cases, the veneration has taken a particular form. Making all allowances for the peculiarities of each case, we find ample grounds for the generalisation that miracle-stories are a normal expression of a church's reverence for its Founder. Hence the alternative: either miracles (in the old sense of the word) really happen quite commonly at the birth of new religions, or they are the product of a pious and sometimes superstitious reverence, working upon the more or less extraordinary circumstances of the Founder's life. We need not now go back over this part of our discussion. We need only say that the nature of the evidence, even in the case of Christianity, inclines us strongly towards the latter opinion.

Further, we find that this appearance of miracle-stories is only one sign of a progressive veneration for the Person of the Founder, which, beginning in a relatively natural regard, may ultimately come to think of Him as an infallible teacher, a sinless being, and (in senses varying with the theism of the disciples) actually divine. And then by degrees this divinity of the Founder tends to be set up as

the central doctrine of His Church, and to be surrounded and safeguarded by a host of correlative doctrines, till the impression is created that the whole structure stands or falls together, and that to disbelieve one doctrine is to disbelieve all.

At this stage the religion may very well be more powerful and effective from the worldly point of view than it has ever been before. It may have more adherents (at least of the nominal sort), more wealth, more splendid services, a closer interrelation with society and civilisation. It may exercise a wide moral influence, and produce in the inner circle of its believers a fine type of mystical and ascetic devotion. But it may be winning this success at the cost of departing from the letter, and even from the spirit, of its Founder's teaching.

This departure may be either good or bad in itself—experience seems to show that it is inevitable; but in either case it leads to the same difficulties. For, sooner or later, as historical knowledge increases, the religion will have to face the question of the validity of its own development, in view of historical discoveries as to the actual nature of the Person and teaching of its Founder.

The form taken by this criticism will depend upon the nature of the development. Roughly speaking, the latter follows two lines. One consists in the elaboration of doctrine, out of touch with history, or through the allegorisation of historical fact, as in Gnosticism. The other consists in the development of belief about historical facts—that is, not merely about their religious significance, but also about their historic form—as, for instance, in the alterations, in the Docetic interest, introduced into some of the Apocryphal Gospels. The first kind of development may come into question on the side of philosophy: it is only the second which is challenged by historical criticism.

In the case of Christianity, whilst the development of theology has been mainly of the former kind, that of Christology has been mainly of the latter. For, in some measure from its earliest days, and quite deliberately ever since the Church's acceptance of the fourth gospel, the doctrine of the Person of Christ has been represented as a corollary of the historical facts, as they were understood. Two very important results have followed. First, the divinity of Christ has come

to be thought of not as a faith, but as a fact—not as a meaning given to His life, or a judgment made about its value, by religious experience, but as a unique and miraculous quality which He possessed, and which He would have possessed, even if nobody had ever credited Him with it. And, secondly, as a consequence of this, it is assumed that the divinity ought to be and can be proved, not by religious insight, but by historical evidence.¹

Now evidently the criticism of the miracles of Christ, however valid it may be, is at best a side-issue, if Christ Himself was a miracle. And if the miracle of Christ's Person was a fact, then and there, in history, it can be and must be investigated by the methods which we have already applied to the lesser miracles. The apologetic which falls back on the miraculous Person of Christ cannot, and indeed does not generally wish to escape the challenge of historical criticism. Sometimes, however, it makes a quite inadmissible claim. Faith or

¹ This point of view exists in different forms, and in different degrees. Most of those who share it would no doubt admit that the proof of faith has *some* validity. But the essential characteristic of this attitude is its reliance upon the external historical proof of what is regarded as an external historical fact.

experience, it suggests, can make us sure, not merely that Christ is (in present value) divine, but also that He was so (in past historical fact). It is, of course, the case that the personal impression which a witness makes upon the court may tell more than the actual evidence which he gives. Religious insight may be the most valuable means of biblical exegesis. But to suggest that, in the absence of evidence, or even against the evidence, a verdict can be arrived at from a personal impression of the witness, is absurd. Christian experience can tell me what Christ is now : it cannot tell me what He was or did two thousand years ago. If the divinity of Christ turns in any degree upon His miraculousness, then it is to history that both those who support and those who attack this idea must go. This, then, is the point at which modern criticism, with many new resources at its command, takes up the problem. Let us therefore examine, in turn, some of the heads under which the divinity of Christ as a historical miracle, historically provable, has been generally stated, and see what criticism has to say to them. Let it be clearly understood, at the outset, that our treatment is conditioned by

the way in which the problem is stated by orthodox apologetic. What we are concerned with is not the truth or falsity of the belief in Christ's divinity, but the sufficiency or insufficiency of defining that divinity in terms of historical fact.

In most treatments of this question much space is given to an exposition of the Christology of the Epistles, and of the early Fathers of the Church, with the result of showing how primitive and universal was the belief in a miraculous divinity of Christ. But this is a contention which is not really disputed, so far as it concerns Pauline and Patristic theology. And one suspects that this great show of early authority is sometimes made, not simply to prove what the Church believed about Christ, but also under the impression that a belief so generally held must have been true. It appears that many who reason in this way are quite unconscious of the fatal gap in their argument. Take, for instance, one of Dr. Liddon's most eloquent perorations, which occurs towards the end of his third Bampton Lecture. 'The truth,' he says, 'which really and only accounts for the establish-

ment in this our human world of such a religion as Christianity, and of such an institution as the Church, is the truth that Jesus Christ was believed to be more than man, the truth that Jesus Christ is what men believed Him to be, the truth that Jesus Christ is God.' Even the least attentive hearer of these words must have been struck by the easy way in which the preacher assumes that belief is equivalent to truth. The fallacy is not often so naïvely exposed. But it underlies very much of what passes for evidence in this controversy. It is far too readily assumed that none but true doctrines have vitality in them, and that men do not suffer and die for a wrong cause.

Even those who are conscious of this fallacy often urge that there were special conditions in the case of early Christianity which enable us to bridge the gap between faith and fact with a confidence which is impossible elsewhere. One contention is that the apostles were such exceptionally trustworthy witnesses that they cannot have been mistaken as to the facts on which they founded their faith. 'They were qualified as witnesses,' says one writer,¹

¹ Gore, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 74.

'because, free from all preoccupation with ideas and systems, they were plain men who could receive the impress of facts ; who could tell a simple, plain tale, and show by their lives how much they believed it. And they were trained to be witnesses. Jesus Christ intended His Gospel to rest on facts ; and in correspondence with this intention, the whole stress in the Apostolic Church was laid on witness.' But, in point of fact, we know nothing about the character of the apostles, beyond what can be inferred from the Gospels, and from the general condition of the population of Galilee at that time ; and we know very little indeed about their lives. There is absolutely no evidence that they were trained to be witnesses in any sense which would make them specially competent to observe or to record facts ; nor does the criticism of the Gospels suggest that they were particularly successful in telling 'a simple, plain tale.' The good character of a witness (as every lawyer knows) is no security that he has observed the facts correctly, or that he was in a position to observe them, or that he was able to draw right inferences from what he observed. And it is one of the clearest conclusions of history,

both political and religious, that men often 'show by their lives how much they believe' in people who are deceiving them, or in causes which are pure illusions. We do not of course say that it was so with the apostles: we only say that we cannot lightly assume the contrary.

Or again, it is contended, as in Dr. Liddon's argument, already quoted, that the wonderful progress and persistence of the Christian Church proves that what it believed was true. But one of the things which is most obvious to a student of religions is the persistence of religious sects which, if they were not based on an illusion, seem to have lost both the *raison d'être* and the enthusiasm which they formerly possessed. Persistence (and even a kind of progress) is no sure evidence of truth. We may instance Mormonism and Christian Science in America, and in England the Catholic Apostolic (or Irvingite) Church, which has many interesting analogies to the early Christian Church, as cases in point. Besides, wonderful as the history of the Christian Church has been, we should hesitate to make the suggested inference in this case alone, and to ignore the much older and still dominant

religions of the East. Or again, in some countries, and at certain times, Islam has conquered Christianity: but we cannot argue the superior truth of the claims of Mohammed. All depends upon the circumstances under which a Church persists, and upon the manner in which it progresses. And history shows that the success of great institutions has often depended less upon the truth of their essential principles than upon various contributory or accidental circumstances, and upon the pertinacity with which they have been propagated and believed. This, again, may not be true of Christianity; but we cannot lightly assume the contrary; certainly the existence of the Church, even were it far more unaccountable than it is, would be no proof that events which the apostles believed to have happened actually occurred.

In short, as we have had occasion to say before, the only way to establish historical facts is by historical evidence. The Epistles and the Fathers are evidence for the growth of certain beliefs: the Church is evidence for their efficacy; but neither is evidence for their truth.

Where, then, is such evidence to be found? The

answer is—Primarily in the Gospels, and (to a lesser degree) in some other parts of the New Testament. The Gospels are not wholly different from other books of the New Testament. They, too, are largely evidence for religious belief, as distinguished from historical fact. They include much that was written or adapted for doctrinal, or evidential, or apologetic purposes. They often colour the primitive facts with a far from primitive faith. It is difficult, and it must always remain difficult, to dissociate their earlier from their later elements. But they do include some original sources—some genuine evidence for hard facts. We are not shut up in the sceptical conclusion that ‘it is impossible to get at the facts.’ Nor are we bound to choose between the alternatives that follow it—either the theory that one belief is as good as another, or the conclusion that we may accept without question any version of the facts which has been sanctioned by the authority of the Church. For the Gospels do contain material by means of which modern criticism is able to check the validity both of primitive and of later belief.

At this point we must raise the question of the

fourth gospel. For, if that gospel is what the conservative critics say that it is, our search for a historical proof of the miraculous divinity of Christ need go no further. If Christ really acted and spoke as He is represented as doing in that gospel ; if, from day to day, He claimed supernatural knowledge, and worked astounding miracles ; if He thought and spoke of Himself as pre-existent with God before the creation of the world ; if He did all this sanely and deliberately, and if it has been truly described for us by His most intimate disciple, then, in spite of the difficulty of reconciling this picture with that given in the other gospels, we could hardly be surprised that so many refuse to move from the belief that the divinity of Christ was a miracle, that is, a historical fact which, however unique, falls under the review of historical criticism. It is true, of course, that this would be a one-sided view to take of the fourth gospel. Even conservative criticism allows that it contains a mystical as well as a historical Christology, and that it depreciates the faith founded on miracles in comparison with the faith of those who 'have not seen, and yet have believed.' Nevertheless, if its

history, however related to its mysticism, is to be taken as literally true, then the result will be as we have said. And, so long as the Church accepts the historical elements of the fourth gospel in this sense, Christian belief is easily satisfied with a historical definition of the divinity of Christ. It becomes something that Christ was, then and there, quite independently of what was thought about Him. If He had never made a disciple, if He had lived and died unrecognised, He would still have been divine. If there had never been a Christian Church, or if, by common consent, Christians were to cease to think of Him as God, that would not alter the fact of His divinity.

It is impossible here and now to give an adequate account of the objections which have been brought against the historical character of the fourth gospel. So far as the authorship is concerned, few competent critics nowadays would defend the ascription to St. John the apostle: that question may almost be regarded as closed. That there may be some Johannine as well as some Synoptic traditions behind the gospel, need not be doubted. But everything turns on the use which is made of them

—on the general representation of Christ to which they are subordinated. And here the case against the gospel is overwhelming. It is almost impossible to suppose that the discourses in the fourth gospel were spoken by the speaker of the Sermon on the Mount; or to find a place in the Synoptic tradition for such an event as the raising of Lazarus; or to reconcile the concealment of the Messiahship in the earlier gospels with its open declaration in the fourth; or to give a historically rational account of the relations between Jesus and the Jews, as described in this gospel; or to translate into psychological terms its representation of Christ's own self-consciousness. It is these things—to mention only a few of the difficulties—which drive us to the conclusion that the description of Christ in the fourth gospel is, in certain important respects, unhistorical. These points are being more and more recognised by students, and it is only the absence of a good critical commentary in English which prevents their being brought within reach of every reader of the gospel.¹

¹ As marking the direction in which criticism is moving, it is very significant that the critical view of the gospel should have been

The upshot of modern criticism is that we cannot safely accept the historical portrait of Christ in the fourth gospel as true to life, or use the statements of this gospel as evidence for what He actually said or did. If at any time our argument leads us to lay the main stress upon the proof by faith, we shall return with fresh interest to St. John. But since at present we are looking for historical evidence, we must fall back upon the Synoptic Gospels.

The idea of the miraculous divinity of Christ as a historical fact, historically provable, has been associated principally with four lines of argument drawn from these Gospels. Of these the first need

accepted by one of the most distinguished Roman Catholic scholars of the day, writing in the new edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 'The book's method and form,' he says, 'are pervadingly allegorical; its instinct and aim are profoundly mystical.' . . . 'The fourth gospel is the noblest instance of this kind of literature, of which the truth depends, not on the actual accuracy of the symbolising appearances, but on the truth of the ideas and experiences thus symbolised.' . . . 'The attribution of the book to an eye-witness nowhere resolves, it everywhere increases, the real difficulties; and by insisting upon having history in the same degree and way in John as in the Synoptists, we cease to get it sufficiently anywhere at all.'—VON HÜGEL, article on St. John's Gospel.

not detain us now. It was the argument from miracles. Assuming the literal truth of all the miracle-stories in the Gospels, it was easy to argue that the miracle-worker Himself must have been miraculous. The Pharisees' alternative being unthinkable—it being impossible that 'Satan should cast out Satan'—it was inferred that He was God. But if (as even conservative critics allow) the extremer kind of miracles at any rate need not be insisted upon, a smaller hypothesis might cover the facts that are left. And if, as our view of the evidence suggests, no incidents occurred which cannot be explained on the lines of psychical phenomena and faith-healing, the argument falls to the ground. Indeed, the directly evidential use of the miracle-stories has been given up by the more far-sighted Christian apologists, for some time past, on general grounds; so that we need not insist further upon its inadequacy. But, although we cannot find in the miracle-stories sufficient evidence that Christ possessed superhuman powers, yet we have ample grounds for saying that His human powers were of a quite uncommon kind. It is possible that the contribution of His own personality,

in cases of faith-healing, was so much more preponderant than is generally the case, that analogies to the miracle-stories of the Gospels which we find in other parts of history are not always complete. And the feeling that, even in an age familiar with such things, Christ's miracles went beyond common experience, was doubtless part of the historical basis of the belief in His divinity. Beyond that history cannot go.

A second line of argument, which was at one time confidently followed, has also been put out of use by the advance of criticism. It was assumed that the representation of Christ in the Gospels implied, if it did not state, the infallibility of His human intelligence: and infallibility would be a miracle. But a proper insistence on the human limitations to which the Gospels bear witness, and the discovery, which came from Old Testament criticism, that Christ accepted popular but erroneous views of the authorship of some of the Jewish Scriptures, have enabled us, at least since the publication of *Lux Mundi*, to regard this idea as a mistake.¹ Nor can it be denied that this change of view, which

¹ 'The recognition of these phenomena of our Lord's life leads us to the conclusion that up to the time of His death He lived

is now fairly widely accepted, opens the door to further developments, which can hardly stop short of a thoroughly realistic view of Christ's humanity. This process is the proper preliminary to a restatement of the historical grounds of the belief in His divinity. We cannot tell how He surpasses others, until we know in what He resembles them. Indeed, it is more than a preliminary. If the Christ, the object of our worship, is to remain a real Person, we must carry His humanity with us in every step towards the realisation of His divinity. 'It is the utterness of His humanity that is the proof of His divinity.' But—this is our immediate point—this same change of view makes it increasingly unlikely that we shall be content to define the divinity in merely historical terms. The humanity is the ground and proof of the divinity, but it *is* not that of which it is the ground and proof. The identification of fact and faith, of Jesus and Christ, can be made only by religious experience, and can be expressed only in terms of present value.

and taught, He thought and was inspired and was tempted, as true and proper man, under the limitations of consciousness which alone make possible a really human experience.'—GORE, *Dissertations*, p. 87.

A third argument is one about which it is more difficult to speak. It is the argument from Christ's sinlessness. The primary difficulty is that no attempt is generally made to define the meaning of the term. Edward Irving was excommunicated by the Scotch Presbyterians for teaching that the human nature which Christ assumed was our fallen human nature, not purified and renewed, but still liable to sin: but most of us, I think, find it as difficult as he did to attach any meaning or merit to sinlessness, unless it involves the conquest of sinful tendencies—the control of a nature definitely liable to sin. We, too, put the holiness that is achieved in face of temptation above the innocence of untried virtue. We cannot feel that Christ's sinlessness is any help to our sinfulness, unless He fought and won the same battle which, without Him, we fight and lose.

The importance of a right definition lies in this—that whilst the sinlessness of Christ when defined in the negative sense (*i.e.* as the absence of any liability to sin) certainly does not admit of proof, it also fails to account for at least two passages in the Gospel, in which Jesus seems to be conscious of

possessing a nature at any rate liable to sin. One is the story of His coming to John's baptism of repentance ;¹ the other is his answer to one who showed Him personal reverence—'Why callest thou Me good ? none is good save one, even God.'² On the other hand, the positive definition of sinlessness, making it equivalent to supreme holiness won, after contest against real temptation, in a nature liable to sin, yet without sin, would seem to answer more closely to the actual impression which the figure of Christ in the Gospels produces upon us. We thus reach the provisional conclusion, that the only form of sinlessness which we should feel to be miraculous is just that which cannot be proved, and is perhaps disputed, by the Gospels : whilst that kind which is suggested by the historical evidence would not necessarily be superhuman or miraculous at all.

There is a further difficulty, which can only be met by a clearer definition of the idea of sinlessness. Ordinarily we speak as though both sin and goodness had to do primarily with moral virtue, not with intellectual. But this is an indefensible

¹ Mark i. 9 and parallels.

² Mark x. 18 and parallels.

position. Both terms ought to cover a man's character and personality as a whole, with his intellectual as well as his moral qualities. Although it is the habit of the society in which most of us live to attach greater importance to the latter than to the former, they are not really more essential; nor are we less responsible for our intellectual than for our moral character or conduct. And, if so, it at once becomes a question what judgment we are to pass upon natures unequally developed upon these two sides. Both the Gospel and the Person are Jewish, not Greek, and stand for an ideal which is moral rather than intellectual.

✓ This suggests the further doubt as to the point of view from which sin and sinlessness are defined—whether it is relative or absolute. Can we call one sinless who, up to the level, or within the limits, set by contemporary ideals, lives faultlessly? Or, knowing that the level has risen and will rise, and that the limits have widened and will widen, must we reserve the word sinless for absolute achievement at the summit of development?

These are difficulties which cannot be solved in a day. They are only mentioned here as a warning

against a too easy reliance upon arguments based on the 'moral miracle' of Christ's sinlessness.

A fourth argument is often drawn from Christ's personal claims. Those which have been supported from the Synoptic Gospels, and upon which most stress has been laid, are His claims to teach authoritatively, to be the destined Messiah, and 'to give His life a ransom for many.'

Three things may be said about this argument. In the first place, it must always be a difficult matter to determine how far Christ's claims, as represented in the Gospels, are historical, or how much in them is due to the reaction of later belief about Christ upon the original facts. There are, for instance, claims made in the fourth Gospel which we rightly feel to represent less what Christ Himself asked than what the Church gave. Must not the same allowance be made—no doubt on a smaller scale—for the effect of similar tendencies in the Synoptic Gospels? In the second place, we have little means of judging what claims might or might not have been made, without transgressing human limits, or without any fall from perfect holiness, by one who entered into the Jewish

apocalyptic hopes with the intense enthusiasm that Jesus evidently did. Those who know what astounding claims have been made from time to time by prophets and founders of religions, and with what readiness they have been acknowledged by their followers, will not be in a hurry to limit the possibilities in this case, or to apply the dangerous argument—‘*aut deus, aut homo non bonus.*’ Under this head, no doubt, we should have to consider the points which are sometimes urged with regard to Christ’s consciousness of Himself as standing in a unique relationship to the Father. But we should find, I think, that this line of argument, too, shares the same disability. And the ultimate issue—as to the inference from self-consciousness to personality—is one which history cannot decide, but only psychology. Thirdly—and this is the most important consideration—our readiness to believe in the truth of a person’s claims depends almost entirely upon our estimate of his character. As (according to some apologists) the doctrine proves the miracle, not the miracle the doctrine, so it is the character which proves the claims, not the claims which prove the character. If (in the

present case) the character does not demand the hypothesis of a miracle, the claims cannot. It is therefore upon the character of Christ's mind and will and heart—upon His teaching, His morality, and His religion—that the weight of the argument must fall.

Here at last traditional apologetics reaches the point. All its other arguments fall to the ground, unless the study of Christ's character forces us to the conclusion that He was divine. This cannot be too strongly emphasised. From the first days to the last, it has been the character of Christ which has converted the world. It has won an allegiance which no formal arguments could have secured, and which no creeds can express. It has prevailed even against the unfaithfulness and misrepresentations of the Church. In the 'ages of faith,' it has saved the Church from the worst superstitions; and when the Church has been almost dead, it has kept Christ alive in hearts that the Church never touched. It is the one argument which Christian apologetics need never have been ashamed to use, and upon which it has never relied in vain.

And yet it is just when we recognise this, that

we also make a discovery which has been gradually becoming inevitable. There is no historical proof of the divinity of Christ. When we speak of His character, when we attribute to Him supreme holiness, when we describe Him as unique in the history of the world—indeed, whatever we say of Him *in the past tense*—we come no nearer, in common aspiration, to calling Him ‘God.’ From the historical point of view, no fresh excellence that we ascribe to Christ as man makes it any more possible for us to regard Him as God. This is the *impasse* to which the attempt to define our subject in historical terms inevitably leads.

History is common experience written down; and common experience, though it makes allowance for the supernatural influences and motives which play so large a part in life, subordinates them to the strictly human personalities in which it finds them at work. With personalities not strictly human it can have nothing to do. That is to say, if their actions might include moral miracles, parallel to the physical miracles which experience has already rejected, history could not deal with them. History, indeed, achieves universality, and

proves itself true, on the assumption that such events do not occur: and conversely, the success of history is the proof that the assumption is right. If they were to occur, historical experience would give us no principles or precedents by which to deal with them. It could only treat them as falling outside the world of which scientific knowledge is possible, and suggest the possibility of other methods of inquiry.

That is what it does in the present case. The world's verdict on the supreme holiness of the character of Christ is beyond question: but it cannot, and obviously does not, in the mind of the world as a whole, arrive at the historical conclusion, 'Christ was God.' The utmost that history can do, in this direction, is to hand on an accurate report of faith. In virtue of our Christian faith now, we can say 'we believe in the divinity of Christ.' History, describing the similar faith of the first disciples, can say, 'They believed that He was divine.' It cannot say more. In both cases the faith so expressed is an assertion of religious belief; it cannot be a proof of historical fact. It may turn out that we need no more—from history;

and that the ultimate question concerns not faith only, nor reason only, but both. In that case there arises a problem which can only be met by religion; for the religious consciousness, whilst working upon the materials provided by the scientific consciousness, goes far beyond the latter in method and in scope.

The historical *impasse* which we have just described might have been foreseen at the outset of our inquiry. But it is better to have followed out the supposed historical proofs to their inevitable end, and to have seen how we are forced to the conclusion that the one point hitherto assumed to be worth proving cannot be proved by historical evidence. It is only so that we can realise to the full the necessity of a different basis for Christian apologetic.

Before we leave the historical evidence, one other point must be considered. Those who have been accustomed to regard the Gospels as a store of proof-texts for the historical divinity of Christ will think that we have understated the evidence. But it is quite as likely that some modern critics will think that we have overstated it. For, if we accept provisionally the results of the 'thoroughgoing

Eschatological' school, there is an important element in the historical evidence which suggests that Christ's most intimate and essential beliefs were those of a visionary and a fanatic—one therefore (it is feared) hardly worthy of the Church's worship. Nevertheless, no suggestion that Christ was unworthy of the Church's worship can alter the fact that the Church has worshipped and does worship Him. And it may be doubted whether, even if the Eschatological argument were carried much further than it seems likely to go, it would seriously affect the future religious experiences of Christians—not only because Christian belief sits less closely to any one version of the historical facts than it used to do, but also because the real clue to Eschatology is being provided by the psychology of religion. That is to say, in recognising the variety of subjective experiences through which the very God comes into men's lives, we are preparing to give the highest, and not the lowest, interpretation to what was subjective in Christ Himself. It may be that we shall accept the Eschatologist's premises, and deny the conclusion which some would draw from them. The paradox would not be greater than that which the

first Christians accepted—the worship of a crucified Messiah.

Once more, before passing on, let us look at two attempts which have been made to avoid the historical *impasse* to which our argument has led. One group of theories supposes that the divine attributes, and what it calls the ‘cosmic functions’ of the Deity, were actually present in the consciousness of Christ, but in a wholly or partially suppressed state, so that they hardly appear under historical examination. ‘Within the *sphere* and *period* of His incarnate and mortal life, He did—and as it would appear did habitually—doubtless by the voluntary action of His own self-limiting and self-restraining love—cease from the exercise of those divine functions and powers, including the divine omniscience, which would have been incompatible with a truly human experience.’¹ But when we look into the Synoptic Gospels we find no positive evidence for such a hypothesis, which is not equally good, or better, evidence for a purely humanitarian view of Christ’s person. It implies the absence of divine qualities: it does not suggest their suppres-

¹ Gore, *Dissertations*, p. 94.

sion. Besides, this hypothesis involves a theory of Christ's consciousness of a kind which can neither be proved nor disproved : that is, it is a bad hypothesis. And it leads to unnecessary difficulties : we cannot see, for instance, why such divine powers, generally suppressed, should have broken through in just those miracles which (on this theory) actually happened. Finally, this view supposes a dual personality in Christ which is psychologically inconceivable. This is the failing of all such Kenotic theories ; 'For they picture the Incarnate as a dual consciousness in the sense that they require two centres of activity in the lower state ; a centre of self-abandonment, and a centre of His divine-human or human activities, after the self-abandonment has taken place.' ¹

The other line of escape that has been suggested is by way of the modern psychological idea of the subliminal consciousness. We are asked to picture ordinary human consciousness as the narrow neck of a bottle, filled with a sponge or strainer, through which subliminal influences and ideas are filtered

¹ Weston, *The One Christ*, quoted by Sanday, *Christologies Ancient and Modern*, p. 171.

up into the ordinary levels of consciousness. In Christ's case, we are told, 'feats of which the conscious soul is not capable become possible with the help of the subconscious. The narrow-necked vessel has an opening at the bottom, which (in this case only) is not stopped by any sponge. Through it there are incomings and outgoings, which stretch away to infinity, and in fact proceed from, and are God Himself.'¹ This curious conception, although doubly metaphorical, might perhaps help us to explain the nature of the ordinary human consciousness which Christ shared with men. But, as an attempt to obtain a historical and psychological footing for an extraordinary and divine element in that consciousness, it has been quite rightly criticised. For the subconscious, whatever it may be, is subordinate to the conscious, not superior to it. It has no fixed moral character: its promptings are towards evil as well as towards good. And such an interpretation as is suggested above would lead to the same dangerous division in the personality of Christ as was threatened once before. There is, in fact, nothing in the subconscious self which

¹ Sanday, *Christologies Ancient and Modern*, p. 178.

encourages us to look *there* for a divine element in the historical person of Christ.

Consequently we cannot think that there is any escape in this direction from our previous conclusion—that the divinity of Christ, when conceived as a historical miracle, cannot be proved by historical evidence. And we are driven to face the question, Can it be conceived or proved in any other way?

It will be noticed that this position is closely analogous to that which we reached at the end of our criticism of the old belief in miracles. There, too, the assumption of the historicity of certain events led to a historical *impasse*, and it was only by rescuing faith in Providence from its connection with the belief in miracles that we were able to put the former upon a rational basis. It is something of the same kind which we hope to do here.

The first question, then, which we set ourselves at the beginning of this chapter, seems to be answered. History does not encourage us to think that the original facts underlying the Christologies of the Early Church were any more miraculous than those underlying the miracle-stories. It suggests in this case, as in that, the need of a new

way of expressing spiritual values, without the idea of miracle.

In conclusion, it is worth while to point out that the position in which we rest for the moment, although it has been reached by a negative argument, is not a negative position. We have indeed come to the conclusion that there is not sufficient historical evidence to prove the divinity of Christ. But that was because we accepted the initial assumption that the divinity of Christ means a historical fact, and nothing more. Whereas the truth is, as we have gradually discovered, that, if it means anything at all, it means very much more than a historical fact; it means a religious experience, an act of faith, working upon a historical fact; and the product of the two is something which neither of them, taken separately, could ever have been. For, whatever the fact, by itself, is worth, it cannot (as we have seen) compel us to the judgment 'Jesus was God': and the religious experience, taken by itself, shares just the same disability: for no amount of believing that something is true can actually make it so.

But suppose, now, that we take fact and faith,

as we always find them in real life, together. Suppose that we give to each its utmost value: that we allow, as historical facts, historically provable, the extraordinary personal influence that Christ exercised over all who met Him, sick or whole; the depth and directness of His insight into things human and divine; His perfect holiness, and his burning enthusiasm; His unique self-sacrifice for love of sinners; and His intimate faith towards God; and suppose that we allow, as the proper work of religious experience and faith, just such an insight into and appreciation of this character of Christ as finds in it a supreme revelation of the nature of God, and as issues in prayer, and imitation, and worship, then shall we not be on the way to giving this doctrine of the divinity of our Lord the highest possible meaning, and one which both the progress of criticism and the growth of faith are likely to make more, and not less, secure?

‘That one face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Becomes my universe that feels and knows.’

‘There are great prophets, and there are very small ones . . . A polished stone reflects the light of the sun ; but an untarnished and perfect mirror reflects the image of the sun itself, and gives out both light and warmth. How do we judge that Jesus was a great Prophet? Because He said kind and wise things? No—many have spoken so. Because He died for His belief? Millions have died harder deaths. It is because of the power of the faith He left behind. If one saw a light shaped like a plate in the sky it would be nothing. But because it affords life and strength to all, we know it to be the sun.’—E. S. STEVENS, *The Mountain of God*, p. 323.

IV

CHRIST

THE position at which we have arrived is this. We have discovered, from our criticism of the old idea of miracles, that the main ground of the belief in God's activity in the world and in man is an interpretation put upon historical experience by religious faith. We have applied this principle to the idea of the divinity of our Lord: we have gone far enough to find that the supposed historical proof—the inference from the historical facts—is by no means inevitable: and we have suggested that, here too, the basis of Christian apologetic needs to be sought less in historical science, and more in religious experience. There *are* facts, and there *must be* faith: but the stress of the argument falls on faith.

In speaking thus of faith, we must be clear that there are some things which faith can do, and some

which it cannot. It is, as we have seen, the supreme judge in all questions of religious value, though it has for assessors reason and conscience. But reason, working through scientific method, is the supreme authority on matters of historical fact. Nothing ought to be believed to have happened, as a historical fact, which cannot be supported by sufficient historical evidence. Nor are there any grounds, other than historical (including, of course, such presuppositions as are proper to history), upon which such facts can be established. No intuition or act of faith can of itself make or unmake a single fact in history.

Consequently, in whatever sense faith can establish the divinity of Christ, it cannot prove that it was a historical fact, in the sense in which history might prove His birthplace, or His death under Pontius Pilate. What, then, can faith prove? What is the value of its work? And in what relation does it stand to facts? Is the criticism of the supposed historical proof a surrender (as some say) of the whole Christian position? Or is it merely waking up to find that the proof of facts is a dream, and that in the day's work of faith there

are much greater realities ? This is the second of the two questions which we set out to answer.

What is really needed, in order that we may understand and estimate the judgment of faith upon the person of Christ, is that we should attempt to analyse personal Christian experience. This experience is, often enough, curiously compounded, and few Christians would be able to point to a single and exclusive origin or ground of their belief in Christ's divinity. But that the belief is, in the last resort, *felt* rather than reasoned, will hardly be doubted. In the really big affairs of life, we are all mystics : we love and hate, as we breathe and sleep, without calculation. And religion, which is most akin to love, is farthest removed from the deliberate weighing of evidence. The proof of Christ's claim is found in the privacy of prayer and worship, and in the holiness of the life which is 'hid with Christ in God.'

It is never an easy matter to analyse religious experience. And it is almost impossible that any one view should be properly representative of the common and essential elements in the great variety of such experiences. But nothing is more important,

at a time when the weight of Christian truth is being more and more shifted from a dogmatic to an empirical basis, and when (on the other hand) the validity of the most intimate experiences is being questioned, than that the Church should study its own thoughts and feelings about Christ, determine its attitude towards the psychology of religion, and lay the foundations of a philosophy of faith. It is solely as a contribution towards this most desirable end that we may venture to attempt a very partial analysis of the Christian's experience of Christ in respect of three points—His teaching, His example, and His Person.

(1) Our first question is, what is the actual relationship of the Christian to the teaching of Christ ?

If we are Christians, we do not readily compare Christ's teaching with that of other great prophets or thinkers. Our allegiance to Christ is instinctively uncritical, like that of a lover to the person whom he loves. But it will help us to give an account of our faith, and to justify our allegiance, if we compare the Christian's attitude towards Christ's teaching

with that of any other disciple towards any other master, and if we try to see wherein the difference consists.

First, whatever value or authority we attach to the teaching (let us say) of Aristotle or of Spinoza, is due, not simply to the reputation or personality of the philosopher himself, but to the judgment which experience passes upon it, that it is (as a whole) fine and true. This judgment, in the case of teaching which has become 'classical,' is the judgment both of the experts and of the crowd. But ultimately it is the judgment of each of a number of individuals: and an individual may succeed, now and again, in modifying the judgment of the crowd by a forcible expression of a new interpretation.

Secondly, the teaching of all philosophers contains many things which are in themselves inadequate, exaggerated, or simply untrue. But—this is to be noticed—it is often just these parts of their teaching which are the most fertile and stimulating to the minds of their readers. A school of Aristotle or of Spinoza grows up, in which the master's ideas achieve a permanent influence, not in their original

independence and (it may be) one-sidedness, but rounded off and enriched in the varied experiences of the disciples. When this has taken place, the judgment of later generations upon the master includes these parts of his teaching as well as others, and his greatness is estimated, not merely by his personal and fully expressed opinions, but also by the influence of what he only half intended upon the mind of society as a whole. The name which we use is Aristotle; but what we value under the name is Aristotelianism.

Now, an unreflective person might say, 'It is quite different in the case of Christ. We accept His teaching on His own authority, or on that of a society which He definitely founded to perpetuate it, or on that of a book which faithfully reproduces it. It was intended to issue in the creeds and conduct of the Church. The teaching of Christianity *is* the teaching of Christ.' But this objection really does not represent the facts. For the sake of convenience, in dealing with uneducated people, or with crowds, we make use of a readiness which is still very real, though less common than it was, to accept without question teaching based on the

authority of Christ or of the Church—a readiness which is due to long association of ideas, and to a particular kind of religious education. But we soon discover, if we trouble to think about it, that this authoritative basis rests, in its turn, on the ultimate reasonableness and goodness of the doctrines which it supports ; that dogmatic theology claims to be and ought to be the formulation of religious experience ; and that we may be required at any time—as for instance, in dealing with unbelievers—to argue our case ‘ upon its own merits ’—that is, to show that what we claim to believe because Christ taught it, we should still accept, whoever were its author, because it seems to us worthy of belief. In other words, the value and authority which we attach to the teaching of Christ rests ultimately not upon His *Ipse dixit*, but upon the judgment of Christian experience that what He taught was good and true.

Nor is this experience, when analysed, found to be more than a complex of the experiences of many individuals : and the varying prominence which has been given, from time to time, to this or that aspect of Christ’s teaching, shows the influence of indi-

vidual interpretations upon the judgment of the Church as a whole.

Further, if we ignore, for a moment, merely conventional ways of thinking and speaking about the Gospel, and try to analyse the method in which Christ's teaching really influences us, we shall admit that it stimulates us by its paradoxes, and exaggerations, and half-truths, quite as much as it persuades us by the authority of what is well-balanced and reasonable in it. In other words, the authority and the truth of the teaching do not belong to what it is in itself, in isolation, but to what it is in conjunction with our answer to it, our use of it. A book has no meaning, if it is not read: and it has different meanings to different readers. We cannot tell what Christ's teaching really is, until we see it embodied in the lives of His disciples.

What we mean, then, when we speak of the authority, or the infallibility, of our Lord's teaching, is the judgment of the best religious experience that through His words it has been led to a knowledge of God which, in all the difficulties of life, has never failed it or deceived it, and to a new life which, when fearlessly followed out, has been one of unrivalled

happiness and usefulness. We do not mean that there is any quality of infallibility resident in the words themselves, taken apart from our understanding or application of them. So that what we say of Christ's teaching is really said of His teaching as interpreted in the 'school of Christ,' that is, in Christianity.

The difference—and it is a profound one—between the case of Christianity and that of Aristotelianism lies not in the relation of the disciple to the teaching, but in that of the teaching to the Teacher, who is in the one case so much more than His teaching, and in the other case so much less. The contrast is not due simply to the fact that the teaching of the Gospels comes to us all intermixed with the record of the life of Christ. The same is true of Newman's teaching, or of Tolstoi's. Nor is it due to the fact that Christ put what He did and what He was before what He taught. Other teachers have done that. It was rather because of His unique success in creating a personal attitude towards Himself—an atmosphere of faith—in which His teaching bore fruit a hundredfold. It was not so much what He was by Himself, as what He made

other people to be when in contact with Him, which accounts for the difference. At bottom, the difference is just that between a philosophy and a religion: but it reaches a special clearness and intensity in the case of Christianity.

(2) Secondly, we have to ask what is the actual relationship of the Christian to the example of Christ?

Here, too, we may begin with an analogy. Whatever value we attach to the example of some great hero of history lies ultimately in the fact, not that he did certain acts, but that our conscience approves of the acts which he did as being fine and heroic. Obviously this is so. Again, our estimate of the acts is founded upon history, that is, upon the reports and researches of individuals; and it is liable to revision if new facts come to light. And, further, we do not expect to find more than some parts or aspects of the ideal life in these or in any other particular examples of heroism. One is a model for intellectual virtue, another for moral; one is remarkable for homely goodness, another for the spirit of adventure. Even the existence of weak points in our heroes is so inevitable as to

be thought a saving mark of humanity; the fact that they have often developed one side of their character at the expense of the rest does not at all necessarily ruin their influence or their example. Indeed, in many actual cases of hero-worship—even if the hero is well worthy of worship—so many factors are at work, and some of them are so accidental and external to the character of the hero, that we are tempted to attribute the whole occurrence to man's need for some one to imitate, some one to admire. Certainly in the rise of some great religions, such as Mohammedanism, whilst the Founder supplies political leadership, it is the followers who contribute religious enthusiasm. The individual hero or saint is hardly more than an outlet for the pent-up religion of the people.

An analysis of our own attitude towards the example of Christ will, I think, show us that here too, great as is the difference between it and any other, the same principles are exemplified. First, although it is not necessary, in brief or popular appeals, to go behind the common assumption that Christ's example is supreme—and indeed, some men have such poor consciences that an appeal based on conscience alone, and not on authority,

would have little chance of being heard—yet we know quite well that the only ultimate justification of that assumption is the approval which conscience gives to the ideals expressed in the life of Christ.

Secondly, the traditional claim of Christ's example varies greatly in its influence, both according to personal and racial differences, and also through changes in the critical and historical views which men hold about Christ. We sometimes speak as though there were no types of religious character to which the Christian ideal does not immediately appeal. But if we have any experience of the infinite variety of men's religious needs, or if we have ever thought about the problem involved in preaching Christ to the Hindu or to the Mohammedan, we shall admit that it is only by a considerable width of private and national interpretation that Christ can become Master and Lord for the whole world. And, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that such changes in the historical conception of Jesus as have come about through criticism have modified the nature and range of His appeal: for the mystical relation of the soul to the living Christ generally takes its rise from, or is conditioned by, the historical study of the Gospels—not, of course,

necessarily from a scientific study of them, but from some theory, directly or indirectly acquired, as to the historical facts which they contain. For instance, we have already suggested that a great influence has been exercised over Christian doctrine and devotion by a particular, and what we believe to be a wrong, criticism of the fourth gospel. The meaning of this is, that the relationship of Christians to the example of Christ is not of a single fixed type, to which the individual must conform, but that it varies very widely, according to necessities which are ultimately those of the age, or of the individual.

Thirdly, if we examine our lives at all carefully, it does not appear that we either do or can make a literal imitation of Christ's example our rule of life. Christ's only doctrine about wealth, the critics tell us, was that it is a great evil, and that we should 'sell all we have and give to the poor': His own life—as regards its external conditions—was that of a mendicant friar. This example in its literal form is of no use to the millions of our people to whom money is an essential condition, not of indulgence, but of happiness and respectability: they can only imitate it at the cost of leaving the

very world in which its imitation (if it had been possible) might have been effective. Similarly, if Christ's only teaching about the commercial life was 'give to him that asketh thee,' and 'resist not him that is evil'—then these are maxims which cannot and must not be set up for a rule in modern industrial society. In these cases we have so long tacitly accepted the ethics of contemporary Christianity, instead of that of Christ, that we are surprised to be told that there is any difference between them. In all such cases our attitude to the example of Christ is not and should not be one of literal imitation, but rather one of liberal interpretation.¹ In other instances we practise, as a part of developed Christianity, virtues derived, like our blood and our language, from many strains of ancestry, only some of which are Christian.

Further, it is with the example as with the teaching: it is often not by the perfectly balanced parts of his conduct that Christ moves us most, but by the stimulus of quixotic, and it may be

¹ What we need is a real equivalent to the ascetic maxims of the Sermon on the Mount—conduct at least as difficult and striking as that which Christ enjoins, yet practicable under modern social conditions.

fanatical acts ;—as when He repudiates His family, or drives the merchants from the Temple, or lays down His life for a visionary kingdom. We shall also bear in mind, at this point, what we previously said as to the Jewish characteristics of Christ's example. Nevertheless, we do not feel that these qualifications in any way belittle Christ's supreme greatness in the things of religion, or the thoroughness of the revelation of God in Him. Only we ought to recognise that His supremacy is based, not on the completeness of His example, in itself, for all human needs, but upon the irresistible appeal which He Himself makes to us : and that rests upon the supremacy *in us*, as in Him, of religious motives.

(3) There remains the hardest and most important part of our analysis of Christian experience :—that which concerns the personal relationship between the Master and the disciple. It is very hard for many reasons, but chiefly because the evidence must, in the nature of the case, be mainly autobiographical ; and generally it is only the exceptional people, who have reached an advanced

age in the spiritual life, who are sufficiently conscious of personal relationship to Christ to be in a position to describe it. Besides, many even of those who share the experience have never accustomed themselves to get outside it, and to criticise it: just as those who are surest in their hold upon truth and right, are often least able to explain why a particular thing is right or true. Thus the point of view of the less conscious and advanced Christian, which is at the same time the most typical, is apt to be ignored.

The closest analogy that we can find to the relationship between Christ and the Christian is that of friendship. The fundamental fact about friendship is that neither party to it is the same by himself, or to the world, as he is to his friend:

‘God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
And one to show a woman when he loves her!’

Indeed a man is hardly himself, except in the company of his friends: and, could we describe him at that moment, it would be in terms which the general public might never recognise. In other words, the relation which we call friendship rests

upon an understanding and sympathy which is real and intelligible to nobody except the parties to it, and which produces effects in the friends which would not have occurred in them without the friendship.

Friendship therefore involves this further peculiarity—that there is no appeal from the verdict which a man passes upon his friend to any better method of judgment. Public opinion does not go behind this verdict: it only combines it with the judgments of other friends, if such are available. But it only allows this jurisdiction to the friend's special knowledge, on condition that it does not go outside matters of which it can fairly judge. For instance, people are often ignorant of quite elementary facts about their best friends—their age, or birthplace, or even their personal appearance—and for such information a book of reference or a photograph may be more trustworthy than personal evidence. It is not about circumstances, but about character, that we ask for personal testimonials.

And again, it is not necessarily a man's best or most striking qualities (as the world would judge

them) which are his point of contact with his friend. Friendship has an element of mystery in it: we cannot explain, or we spoil in explaining, the unaccountable attraction which brings people together. Sometimes similar characters sympathise with one another's unlikenesses: sometimes dissimilar characters form friendships on their small elements of likeness: in proportion as friendship is deep and true, the essence of it escapes analysis. The example for all time is our Lord's dislike of the Pharisees, and His regard for publicans and sinners.

How far, now, are these aspects of friendship analogous to the Christian experience of personal relationship to Christ? The relationship, for most Christians, begins—and it is fortunate if it does not end—in little more than formalities. We do reverence to Christ, pray to Him, and try to imitate Him: we accept, with more or less conviction, the suggestion that He cares for us, and comes close to us in meditation and communion. But of real first-hand knowledge there is, I suspect, comparatively little. Even conversions are stereotyped according to the denominations which assist in

bringing them about. There is no cynicism in suggesting that the bulk of Christian experience is second-hand ; that God, for many of us, is 'the God that we took from a printed book,' and that we know less about Him than about many of our friends. Indeed, it easily comes to be thought the business of the Church to sanction, if not to encourage, this state of mind, and thus to identify ritualism with religion, by keeping up the impression that its own doctrines and discipline are a safe substitute for personal imitation of Christ, and by representing its authority and teaching as equivalent to His own. Experience shows it that direct dealing with Christ is apt to lead the soul into unconventional and dangerous courses.

This encouragement or tolerance of a formal and conventional attitude towards Christ has the effect of suggesting that His side in the relationship is everything, and mine nothing ; that He is the same to me that He is to all Christians ; and that His divinity is a simple, external, objective fact.

But such an attitude, though easiest for the crowd, is not sufficient for those who wish to make

religion a reality. The whole *raison d'être* of the preaching of conversion, of missions, retreats, meditations, and sacramental worship, is to bring about a real personal relationship between the individual soul and Christ. What does that mean? Does it mean a slavery of mere obedience, in which everything that I need is present, ready-made, in Him, and I have only to receive it passively from His hands? Or does it mean a friendship to which I contribute something, and which produces results that would have been different, but for me? Does it mean that I am to become more and more dependent on another's guidance, or that I shall develop a new spirit of originality in myself? Or, if it includes something from both these elements, which predominates?

It is clear that in such a relationship as that of master and pupil, all the higher possibilities depend upon friendship and co-operation. The relationship may begin in simple admiration, imitation, and obedience. But a wise master will not be satisfied with that. He will know that the form which his qualities or ideas take in himself is not their only possible form; that they are limited by other things

in himself which are unworthy of them, or of merely personal importance. He will therefore aim at imparting his *spirit* to his pupil, and will teach him to work out such new applications of it as he can.

Now the principle underlying this evidently is that whatever is good and true in the master is good and true, not absolutely, but under the limitations peculiar to himself; that his true message and morality (that is, not what he has succeeded in expressing, but what he wants to express) can only be discovered in the working out of his spirit in the lives of his disciples.

Apply this now to the personal relationship of the Christian to Christ. If our Lord was in Himself—that is, in His teaching and example and Person—completely and absolutely perfect; if He achieved in a single life that kind of sufficiency for the religious needs of the whole world which the philosophy of Aristotle, for instance, has achieved in the lives of generations of thinkers—and much more than that—then the only attitude possible for the Christian would be that of literal imitation of an external ideal, and passive accept-

ance of a ready-made salvation. But we do not find that this *is* the Christian experience or ideal. Everything that St. Paul says about 'sonship' is a protest against it. The life of the early Christians themselves, lived in the spirit of Christ, yet freely modifying the letter of His commands, and creating new forms to express their faith, absolutely denies it. The whole history of the Church illustrates the absurdity of it. For Christianity has grown by constantly adapting itself to the changing needs of the world, and by working out the spirit of Christ that is in it into new organisations, new doctrines, and new morality. This being so, we are bound to infer that any attempt to express all the significance of Christ in the merely historical terms of the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, must end in failure—that His teaching was not completely expressed in His words, nor His morality in His acts, nor His person in His life; and that we cannot know all there is of God in Him until He lives in the lives of all Christians.

Again, if the experience of the Church (as summed up, for instance, in the Creeds) represented the

experience of all possible types of Christians, then we might hold that Christ has already 'come into His own,' and is fully expressed in the orthodox formulæ of the Incarnation. But, important as these traditions are, the gates of experience were closed too early, and the Christians who remained within were too much of one race and time, to justify such a claim. The Creeds have the weight of the experience which actually went to the making of them, and that was considerable. But the modifications which they have undergone, the mass of Confessions and Articles and conciliar definitions which have grown up round them, and the variety of ways in which they have been interpreted, shows not only that they rest ultimately upon an appeal to individual Christian experience, but also that the final verdict of that experience has not yet been given.

It is worth while to notice, in passing, how undogmatic, and even unorthodox, has been the point of view of many of the great Christian saints and mystics. If they had been allowed to contribute to the Creeds a little of what they contributed to the experience which the Creeds seek

to express, many of our present difficulties would have been avoided.

The third point in our analogy with friendship may be stated thus. A very simple Christian may find all that his life requires—the fulfilment of all its possibilities, in breadth of experience as well as in depth—in personal communion with Christ alone. But a complicated Christian, who keeps open all sides of his nature, finds himself in communion with others besides Christ. He may not be fully aware of this. It is easy, for instance, in meditation, to attribute to direct communion with Christ ideas which have come into our minds indirectly from books which we have read, or from things which we have heard said. It is easy to associate with religion a feeling for art or music which really springs less from our communion with Christ than from our sympathy with Beethoven or Fra Angelico. There are many things in the teaching of Christ which we do not understand until we open up, through Him, spiritual relationship with the great religious teachers of the East. Christianity begins in Christ somewhat as the colours of the

spectrum begin in the prism of glass upon which the sunlight falls.

If we study our experience from this point of view we shall, I think, find that no one historical personality, not even Jesus Himself, is the source of everything that is good or useful in our religious lives. For Christians Christ will be supreme in proportion as religious faith and love set the tone of their whole life, and go deep into its experiences. But the width of the life will depend partly upon other influences, other communions. And the spirit of Jesus will not be doing all that it might, will not reach in us 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,' until it opens up and uses all these other sources of inspiration.

Let us now try to sum up the results of our analysis of Christian experience.

As to Christ's teaching :—we follow it because we judge it to be good and true ; every man must ultimately judge of it for himself ; and its meaning cannot be known until it is followed and applied in all the variety of our daily life.

As to Christ's example :—we imitate it because

our conscience approves of it as ideal ; different men or different races will produce different copies of it ; and its supremacy is due, not to its completeness in all parts of conduct, but to its greatness in the part that matters most.

As to Christ Himself :—His own single life does not show all that He might be—that remains to be seen in the lives of Christians ; the final verdict of Christian experience has yet to be given ; and the spirit of Christ will live in us, not by excluding other spirits, but by transfiguring them.

In a word, it is not what Christ was in Himself, but what He is and may become in us, that is the essence of Christianity.

‘ A Christ not *in us*,’ says William Law, ‘ is the same thing as a Christ *not ours*. If we are only so far with Christ as to own and receive the history of His birth, person, and character ; if this is all that we have of Him, we are as much without Him, as much left to ourselves, as little helped by Him, as those evil spirits which cried out, “ We know Thee who Thou art, the holy One of God.” ’¹

Our answer to the second question, which we

¹ *The Spirit of Prayer*, p. 42.

propounded at the beginning of this chapter, is now given. It is complementary to our answer to the first question. There, under the head of facts, the historical basis of Christology was seen to be no more miraculous than the historical core of the miracle-stories. Here, under the head of faith, the interpretative reaction of Christian experience—once it is set in motion by the creative power of Christ's personality—seems to be as competent to account for Christology as it was to account for the miracle-stories.

Is the Nicene Creed, then, just a miracle-story 'writ large'? Or, if not, what is the difference between the two cases? It is not enough to say that there are many miracle-stories, but only three creeds—that we cannot so easily dispense with the latter. Nor that miracle-stories are easily made, sometimes with very little basis of fact, which is not the case with creeds. Nor that creeds justify themselves by their results in a way that miracle-stories cannot. The real difference lies deeper—in the actual process of faith which is at work in each case. A miracle-story is a mere assertion that something happened in a particular way. The value of the event is no doubt religious, not scientific. But the whole point of the story is to embody this

value in a concrete historical fact, which actually happened so. In Christology, on the other hand, two tendencies are at work : one is more like that which is present in miracle-stories, the other less : both co-operate in making Creeds : and the latter more and more predominates over the former. The germ of the Creeds was a statement of religious value embodied in certain concrete historical facts—though it should be noticed that no attempt was made to underline those which were miraculous : Christ ‘ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried ; and the third day He rose again.’ But by degrees it became necessary and natural to express the religious value of Christ less in historical and more in metaphysical terms. The language of Nicaea—‘ God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father ’—was already quite out of touch with verifiable historical fact. Still more was this the case with the creed of Athanasius. And the one great attempt to bring creed and history together, which is made in the fourth gospel, although it has been accepted

by the Church as the official solution of the problem, only serves to show how far apart they really are.

The Creeds, then, are different from the miracle-stories. Their tendency towards the employment of metaphysical language, although analogous to the symbolism of the miracle-stories, points more clearly to the conclusion which we wish to establish, viz., that the predominant factor in Christology is the interpretative faith of the Church working upon the historical facts, and that therefore the divinity of Christ cannot be adequately expressed in historical terms, but only in terms of religious experience.

In what way, now, are we to apply this view of the traditional Creeds? We can only speak tentatively, and from the limited point of view which we have been adopting throughout—trying to find the true relationship between criticism and experience, fact and faith. But this much may perhaps be ventured. There are, we may suggest, two ways of approaching the problem of the divinity of Christ—a better and a worse. If we start with the assumption that God is almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, and so on, and if we will not use the term divinity of any life which has

not these attributes, then it must be admitted that we cannot find sufficient evidence for the divinity of Christ, either in the history of His life, or in the experience of the Christian Church, taken apart from one another. If, on the other hand, we start both from this evidence, and from this experience, we find ourselves stating the idea of God in a new way, and in one which follows directly from our restatement of the idea of miracles. Our suggestion there was that the divine activity in the world should not be thought of as confined to the nature of the event itself, but as working through the interpretation put upon the event by religious faith. It is consistent with this that we should now say—In so far as the Godhead is thought of as entering into relation with men, divinity cannot adequately be stated except in relative terms. The divinity of Christ is much more than a group of historical characteristics—whether the power to work miracles, or moral uniqueness, or spiritual authority. The Christ of faith is greater than the Jesus of historical fact. There was, indeed, that in the historical Person which inevitably gave rise to the belief in His divinity. But God was in those

who came to hold that belief as well as in Him who gave rise to it. He worked out His will through both. His nature was not fully revealed except where faith met fact. First fact, then faith: that is the necessary order. The faith is interpretative: only the fact is creative. But, without the faith, the Person of Christ would have been a thought unexpressed, a question unanswered, a love unrequited.

Speaking of the divinity from the side of historical facts, we can say that, without the life and death of Jesus Christ, the divine revelation of God in Christ and of Christ in man, with all that has followed from it, would never have come about, and could not possibly survive. We are far from wishing to underrate the facts, or the importance of what history can prove about the Person of Christ. But the historical judgment, as to what Christ was, is less central in Christianity than the mystical or experimental judgment as to what He is. Put as a historical fact, the divinity of Christ may not convince a single historian: held as the symbol of a Church's allegiance, it converts the world. The one meaning of Christ's divinity that matters supremely, both for our own lives and for the

happiness of the world, can be expressed in terms of faith, hope, and love. If we can pray to Him, worship Him, and find, in communion with Him, a real power and inspiration for our lives, then Christ is our Master, our Lord, and our God.

This does not mean that any spiritual experience which seems real to us, or any belief which makes us happy and virtuous, is true. The fact that a belief (as we say) 'works' is good evidence that, if we want our lives to 'work,' we shall do well to believe it: but it is no evidence that it is true. Our religious belief has to be squared with the truth which our reason demands, and with the ideal of goodness which is set up by our conscience. It has to be compared with the beliefs of others who have the same or better opportunities of judging. Even the general experience of Christians must justify itself before the experience of mankind as a whole. That is what we mean when we say that Christ does not fully reveal God until His teaching and example and Person enter into and inspire the experience of the whole world. When, in prayer and worship, we speak of His life on earth as a complete revelation of God, our language can

only be put in the past tense ; but our meaning is in the present and future. We include in the historical facts all the divine possibilities that were latent in them, and we anticipate what, in our lives, and in the life of the whole world, we trust that Christ will become :—somewhat as, in the days of His flesh, His Messiahship was spoken of as something which He was, here and now, but was thought of as something which He was to become at that future time when men should see ‘ the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’

The private act of faith, then, which makes Christ God for us, must be verified and justified by constant contact with reason and religious experience as a whole. That is why we are glad to be members of a Church, and of a nation. But the faith must also be guarded by a proper relationship to the historical facts from which it takes its rise. It is attractive to some minds to fall back upon beliefs which cannot be disproved—such, for instance, as many of our beliefs about the future life. But this may easily become a form of religious cowardice. We want beliefs which are capable (ultimately, at least) either of proof or of disproof.

We want to be reasonable, and, within the limits possible to us, true. Therefore a historical religion, however much beset by criticism, is infinitely preferable to a religious philosophy. It is only in the lives which men live that religion has any meaning: our Christian faith loses its power to make men live, unless it holds fast to the historical personality of Jesus Christ. Only—this is the point of our whole contention—we must not pretend that the historical basis of Christianity is the whole structure, or that its security can be demonstrated in any other way than by building upon it.

There is no ready-made truth. There is no short and easy way to faith. ‘Truth is not truth when it ceases to be plastic, and faith is faith only in the making. We cannot simply receive it, for then it is not yet ours; and we can never finish making it, for it ends only in all truth and all knowledge of the truth.’¹ There is no call for all Christians to question and to restate the old faith. But it is a special duty laid upon the few, who can do so, to think out these things afresh, in order that the many, who cannot do so, may live a fuller and a truer Christian life.

¹ Du Bose, *op. cit.* p. 58.

We should therefore try to establish the divinity of Christ, for ourselves and for others, in some such ways as the following :—by a close and critical study of the historical figure of Jesus Christ : by a comparative study of the religious needs of the world, and of the ways in which religion has attempted to satisfy them : by a philosophy of faith—that is, by a true and scientific estimate of the value of the soul's experience of God and Christ : by a proper allowance for the complex social nature of men, and therefore of religion—that is, by recognising the value of particular religions and churches as a guide to the essentials of religion : and lastly, by endeavouring to share the experience of those to whom Jesus Christ is God, through worshipping Him, praying to Him, and following the steps of His most holy life.

Then, if we fail to reach the Christian faith, or even if we come to the conclusion that it is untrue, we shall at any rate have done our best, and must go on doing our best : we may suffer, as Christ did, for our sincerity towards God : but it would be blasphemous to suppose that God can feel anything but love and pity towards us.

GERD. Let me look upon thy hands.

BRAND. On my hands ?

GERD. They 're pierced and torn !

In thy hair the blood-dew stands,

Riven by the fangèd thorn

In thy forehead fiercely thrust :

Thou the crucifix didst span !

In my childhood Father told me

'Twas another, long ago,

Far away, that suffer'd so ;—

Now I see he only fool'd me ;—

Thou art the Redeeming man !'

IBSEN, *Brand*. Act v.

(Archer's translation.)

Si crucem portas, portabit te.

De Imit. Christi, ii. 12. 5.

V

REDEMPTION

It will be well to sum up the position which we have reached in the preceding chapters, before carrying the argument any further.

In the first chapter we examined the traditional belief in miracles, and came to the conclusion that it could no longer be maintained in face of historical criticism.

In the second we tried to separate the essence of the old belief from its accidental and now discredited form, and to restate it as a judgment of faith in the providential activity of God in the world.

In the third and fourth we described the change which comes about in the idea of the divinity of Christ, when it is based less upon the supposed historical proofs, and more upon religious experience—a change analogous to that which we had already

found to be necessary in the idea of miracles. The upshot of our discussion was that, although without the original facts the faith would never have existed, yet any historical considerations which there may be pointing towards the idea of divinity, are no more than the material out of which that idea is wrought by an act of faith: and that the only ultimate proof of orthodox Christology lies in the personal experience of communion with God in Christ.

This personal experience is, ideally at least, the source of all the great doctrines and practices of the Christian religion. And it is through these derivatives of it that we can best verify and define that central fact. Let us therefore resume the argument by considering one of the most essential of them all—the doctrine of Redemption. We need to ask two questions—first, what is the real nature of the experiences expressed in this word, and secondly, whether, after all, they draw us back towards the old idea of miracles, and of the historical divinity of Christ, or whether they demand and allow of restatement in terms of the new idea. Seeing that hitherto, both in the matter of miracles and in Christology, no inconsistency has been found between

a thorough acceptance of historical and psychological facts and the retention of the essence of faith, we may hope for a similar outcome in the present case.

The great practical achievement of the Church has always been the conversion of sinners. It has done its work in many ways. The redemptive power of Christianity has resided in more than one part of its facts and faith. But, for most modern Christians, Redemption comes by the power of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. It is therefore essential that we should examine the idea of Redemption—not historically or dogmatically, but as it occurs in ordinary Christian experience. Without some such analysis, we cannot decide what is its relationship to that view of the divinity of Christ towards which we have been led.

(1) What we may call the transactional idea of Redemption is still popular. It is still commonly regarded as a definite historical event, not unlike the signing of a treaty, by which the former relations of God and man were annulled, and they undertook new obligations with regard to one another. Perhaps it is inevitable that it should be so, in a nation which is, on the whole, of a legal and political turn

of mind. But generally, nowadays, it is admitted that the change which the death of Christ brings about in the situation takes place, primarily, not in God, but in man. God, it is felt, cannot be supposed to change His mind towards man, but He may make His forgiveness of man conditional—conditional not only upon man's changing his mind towards God, but also upon his changing it in view of the death of Christ; though those who hold this view would still admit that God can and does forgive many apart from faith in the Cross. I say nothing about the more objectionable features which have sometimes been put in the place of the primitive teaching about the Cross—the idea that God's anger with sin is appeased, and His sense of justice satisfied, by the substitution of an innocent victim for the guilty sinner. But, even where the worst features of the old theories have been removed, we are still apt to conceive of the Redemption too little as a spiritual process which comes into operation whenever a sinner repents and is forgiven, and too much as a historical event which took place in Palestine in the year 29 A.D.

(2) In accordance with this view, and partly

through the influence of Greek and Oriental mystery-religions upon early Christianity, it is not uncommonly held that there was a saving power somehow resident in the mere historical incidents of the Crucifixion—in the wounds, or in the blood of Christ, or in the very Cross—above and beyond the efficacy of the Person and teaching of the Saviour: and hence have sprung the detailed devotions of the Passion, with much that is very religious and moving, and some things that are crude and superstitious.

(3) At the same time it would be admitted, by those who are able to go behind the conventional language, that the death of Christ saves us, not actually, but potentially, or, in other words, not of necessity, but of our own free will. Salvation is never compulsory, or magical, or miraculous. There must be a definite will to be saved, expressed in penitence and amendment of life, though this too comes to us, not of our own power, or through our own merit, but of God's free grace. That is, the objective and historical work of Christ must somehow find an answer in the subjective faith of the individual, before it can be effective for the forgive-

ness of his sins. The Christian must himself be crucified and buried, and rise again with Christ.

(4) But we must not leave out of account a feeling which is undoubtedly on the increase, that no redemption is necessary for the forgiveness of sins, or at any rate none that involves any other person besides the sinner. Sometimes, indeed, this feeling goes further, and doubts the possibility and value of forgiveness altogether. Acts once done cannot be undone : what then is the use of grieving over them ? The only penitence that matters is to cease from sin ; the only forgiveness that is valid is the happiness of a reformed life. The religious experience becomes one of the diseases of civilisation.

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid
and self-contained.

I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition.

They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins.

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.

No one is dissatisfied : no one is demented with the mania
of owning things.

Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands
of years ago.

Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.¹

¹ Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself.'

Of these four ways of regarding Redemption, the last, in spite of its crudeness, stands for an essentially religious idea, namely, that the supreme point at issue, as between God and man, is conduct. The more religious a man is, the greater horror he has of mere attitudes in religion. He knows that what God most requires of him, when he falls into sin, is not that he should apologise for the past, but that he should do what is right in the future.¹ He feels, too, that the perfect life should be healthy, spontaneous, natural: he does not think it good to be always in the hands of spiritual doctors, always brooding over his complaints. No doubt he misconceives the relationship of attitudes to acts, and therefore tends to undervalue expressions of penitence and sacraments of forgiveness—treating them as occasional remedies and safeguards, not as a permanent part of the religious life. Nevertheless this impatience with mere penitence lies

¹ 'Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?

'Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?'—ISAIAH lviii. 56.

very deep in many thoroughly religious people, especially among the increasingly large class of the unconventional and churchless Christians ; and it cannot be ignored in any candid treatment of the subject.

The third of the ideas which we mentioned—that which regards the work of Christ as made effective by the faith of the Christian—brings the whole matter of sin and its remedy back to its true origin in ourselves, and insists that it is for us—that is, for God working in us—to deal with it. At the same time it goes beyond the opinion which we have just been describing, in suggesting that personal penitence is a normal, if not a necessary condition of that amendment of life which the advocate of spontaneous goodness might try to achieve without it. And this we shall probably be right in taking as the experience of most religious people.

The second idea—the belief in the special efficacy of the death of Christ—suggests that, as a matter of history, the realisation of sin, and the power to conquer it, although in some degree a part of every religion, have reached their highest development hitherto in those religions which involve the idea

of sacrifice and atonement ; and that this is particularly true where not only the bearing of the weight of sin, but also the supplying of the power that removes it, is attributed to a divine person. For the sense of sin, when it is at all fully developed, is much more than the realisation of the sinfulness of certain kinds of conduct : it is an adverse judgment about oneself in relation to God. And it very soon seems to involve the idea that, as one's own power of goodness is crippled, help must come from some person other than oneself.

And thus we come back to our first idea—the transactional theory of Redemption—and find embodied in its rather crude metaphors the genuinely religious demand for an effective penitence, and a real and valid forgiveness ; that is, for some certainty that through Christ a new element, something at once objective and final, has come into the relationship of the soul to God.

Supposing that such, in general terms, is the common Christian idea of Redemption, what we have now to ask is, whether this conception is affected by our surrender of the old idea of miracles, by our restatement of our belief in Providence, and

by the view which we took in the last chapter of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Now, our main contention throughout has been that the natural may be also the supernatural—that to give a scientific explanation of an event is not to make it any less an act of God. God may be as well (indeed, better) thought of as working in and through a normal as an abnormal event, and a non-miraculous as a miraculous life. If this principle is valid, it follows that whatever real or objective power of Redemption can be attributed to a miraculous life, can be as well attributed to a non-miraculous one. We may readily grant that subjectively, and at some stages of religious experience, there may be less spiritual leverage in a non-miraculous than in a miraculous faith ; just as in some ages, and to some minds, miracle-stories, and miraculous facts embodied in creeds, are a natural food for faith. But if we find a tendency in the experience of conversion to express itself less in miraculous and more in psychological terms, analogous to the tendency towards a more metaphysical method of expression which we found in the case of the Creeds, we shall welcome it as a corroboration of our theory. We

may, at any rate, start from the suggestion that the death of Christ was a specially providential event, through which men have come to the experience of penitence and forgiveness: but that the idea of miracles is not essential to it.

Several questions arise at this point, and demand careful consideration. For instance, it is said that only the sinless can redeem, and that sinlessness is a miracle. The first part of this statement we need not question; we get the inspiration and the power which we need (from outside ourselves) in the struggle against a particular sin, not from those who have indulged temperately in it, but from those who have never been tainted with it at all—though, conversely, they must have felt the temptation, and have definitely overcome it, to be able to help us to the same victory. But we have already seen what difficult questions are raised by the further question as to the meaning of sinlessness. According to one definition (which regards sinlessness negatively, as the complete absence of any evil tendencies), this state would be so contradictory to our experience as to seem miraculous: differently, and, as we thought, more fitly, defined (as a positive character

of perfect holiness won by a struggle against real temptation), it has partial analogies in experience, and need not be regarded as a miracle. It is only on the former supposition that our view involves any fresh difficulty in the idea of atonement.

Or again, it needs to be considered very carefully whether or not the view which we have taken of the divinity of Christ in any way weakens the appeal of the Cross, or Christ's power to save.

Now the very fact that we can raise such a question, and the form in which we put it, show how crucial is the subjective element, the work of faith. The opinion which we hold of Christ makes an immense difference in His power over us—it is indeed all-important. But it does not follow that we need all hold the same opinion in order to acquire the same power. Faith is infinitely various, and so are its effects. And we must be on our guard against two fallacies—the fallacy of supposing that a single doctrine has always been interpreted in a single way, and the fallacy of confusing religious experience with the theological explanations which have been given of it. The last point is specially important. We all of us find it very difficult to distinguish between

what a religious experience really is and means for ourselves, and what we say and fancy that it means, because we have been taught to regard it so. Yet the distinction is an essential one, if we are to attempt to justify, to the world at large, our Christian experience and our religious faith.

And so we must study spiritual facts : we must go to those who have most to do with men as religious beings, and are most able to tell us, apart from theological prejudices, what their essential character is, and how they are affected by the death of Christ. And we shall want real answers to our questions. We shall not be satisfied with any that are true only of certain special or narrow types of religious experience. We shall not assume that results which have been brought about by one method of representing the Christian faith could not have been brought about by any other. And when we appreciate the effectiveness of a particular religious message for one age, or at one stage of civilisation, we shall not shut our eyes to the possibility that different circumstances may demand different representations of the same essential truths. Is it true, for instance, as is so often asserted, that

in mission preaching, and in dealing with individual souls, the story of the Cross is ineffective, unless it is closely related to the Creed? Does the sinner really need any theory of the person of Christ beyond the conviction that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself'? Is not the essence of it all that 'while we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly,' and that 'God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'? I believe that the experience of those who know most about the religious needs of men is with us in this matter. I do not doubt that many of the most effective missionaries and mission preachers preach theology as well as religion, and theology which is dogmatic as well as natural. But I would draw a distinction between two parts of their work. The theology of the Cross is an afterthought. The actual conversion is brought about by the human appeal of Christ's voluntary death for love of sinners — 'the just for the unjust,' the pure for the impure, the holy for the unholy, 'that He might bring us to God.' I do not think that we need find any difficulty or any weakness in preaching repentance

and forgiveness of sins in view of the love of God for the world manifested in the willing martyrdom of Him whom St. Paul calls 'the one man,' the 'one mediator between God and men, Himself man'—Jesus Christ. It is not as a part of the historical picture which appeals to us, or of the argument which convinces us, that the divinity of Christ enters into our conversion; but rather as a position which Christ assumes in our personal experience subsequent to conversion. We need no more, by way of historical fact, than history can actually give, namely, the uniqueness of Christ's humanity. We need, by way of religious faith, all, and much more than all, that experience can give us, of the real revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Or again, it is suggested that the death of Christ is incomplete without the Resurrection, and that the latter, at any rate, was a miracle. Here again, I think, there is some confusion between the religious appeal by which men are converted (and in that, I cannot help thinking, the Cross does not need the help of the Resurrection) and the theology which is used to explain and to establish their new life. The latter is useful to finish the work of the

former, but it is not essential. In any case we have already seen (in the first chapter) that the evidence points towards the idea of a spiritual resurrection without a raising of the dead body, and that there need be no miracle in the event so conceived. It would be a very materialistic view of the Redemption—one that placed the efficacy of Christ's death rather in His broken body than in His consecrated will—which would need a physical resurrection.¹

We do not, therefore, find any insuperable difficulty in these objections. If God (to use the only language which we can use about it) purposed or allowed the death of Christ as a revelation of His love, and a master-stroke of His power, in the eternal contest against sin, and if the religious appeal of the Cross has been found, in experience, to rouse in men a deep penitence, and a genuine amendment of life, so that the world has through it come im-

¹ 'It is not martyrdom to toss
 In anguish on the deadly cross:
 But to have *will'd* to perish so,
 To will it through each bodily throe,
 To will it with still-tortured mind,
 This, only this, redeems mankind.'

IBSEN, *Brand*. Act iii.

measurably nearer to God; then, if this were a miracle, it would be the only miracle that matters; and if no miracle is needed, the same result might be brought about, if God chose to do it so, quite as well through a natural life and death as through a supernatural one—quite as well without miracles, as with them. It is not by any miraculous features in the person who dies, any more than in the event which happens, that we determine the presence or the value of the act of God. If faith and experience tell us that the Cross is a special revelation of God's love, and of His will to save mankind, that is what we want: it does not really help us to imagine—against all the historical probability of the case—that Jesus was one who might have felt no pain, or have come down from the Cross, or have summoned to his aid 'more than twelve legions of angels.' Those are the fancies of a faith that misunderstands not only the facts, but also its own real need. That Christ willingly put Himself into the power of His enemies, and underwent torture and death for love of man—that reveals God, that moves us and saves us. Indeed, on any other terms the Passion becomes unreal, inconceivable: we lose the analogy

between our Lord's heroism and that of other martyrs for righteousness and truth : and there is no room left for us to ' fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ . . . for His body's sake, which is the Church.' If the Incarnation cannot be thought of as completed in the single life of Christ, but only in the continuous life of the Church in communion with Him, no more can the Redemption be thought of as finished on the Cross, or at the Resurrection. What we suffer for truth's sake, or for love of others, is part of His suffering. When a man dies to save his friend, it is still the Cross. Love has not a whit less power in us than it had in Him, so long as it is His love dwelling in us. In so far as we will as He willed, and love as He loved, we too can redeem the world—that is, He can go on redeeming it through us.

We believe, then, that religion involves penitence, and penitence the need of redemption, and redemption a Saviour. We believe that the death of Jesus Christ, when realised by faith as a special revelation of God's love, has power to assure men of forgiveness, and to enable them to lead a new life. And we believe that the efficacy of this plan of salvation

is not weakened, but rather enhanced, if the Saviour lived and died in the ordinary human way.

People sometimes speak of 'the miracle of conversion,' or of 'the miracle of forgiveness.' It is just in such cases, with which it has most to do, that the religious sense gives the truest value to its experiences. Conversion and forgiveness would indeed be the supreme miracles if there were any such at all. But they are not miraculous. They are providential, in exactly the sense that we have tried to define. For there may well be nothing in the experience of the forgiven and converted man that psychology would not be ready to explain: yet this does not in the least prevent our regarding the conversion as a genuine and special act of God's mercy. There is much that is repellent, at first sight, in the modern psychological treatment of religious experiences. But we are not to think that, when those experiences have been correlated with the physical changes of puberty, or with the mental suggestibility of the subject, they have in any sense been explained away.¹ Such correlations, indeed,

¹ 'Everything goes to show that the chief mental qualities and states favourable to these striking experiences are expectation,

make them more certain, because they make them more natural. Everything which shifts the evidence for the supernatural from outside to inside normal human nature, is sheer gain. It makes it easier for us to look upon the whole of human personality as potentially divine. And further, it enables us to see how the orderliness of revelation coincides with the orderliness of the human faculties organised under reason. Before the psychology of religion was seriously studied, it was thought that certain isolated and abnormal states of mind, such as dreams, or ecstasies, or trances, were specially supernatural, and that ideas acquired during these states had a unique spiritual value. But modern psychology is doing much to break down the exclusiveness of the more abnormal mental processes, and is attaching primary importance to an organisation of thought in which the normal processes take the lead. We can say this without any disrespect

abundance of feeling, and passive suggestibility with its tendency to hallucinations and other automatisms. Shall we therefore conclude that conversion is practically an automatic performance? Not unless we first define conversion so as to ignore its profound relation to God, and to the principles of a good life.'—COE, *The Spiritual Life*, p. 139.

towards the present tendency in philosophy to put instinct or intuition above reason—a tendency which we have already so far admitted as to claim independence and validity for the judgments of the religious sense. We only maintain that, in order to achieve universality and objective value, religious intuition must take the whole personality into its confidence, and express itself in rational thought as well as in practical life.

Let us, however, try to see how far our theory squares with the subjective facts of redemption—as, for instance, the experience of forgiveness.

Two lines of thought seem to be included in this experience. One comes from the belief that God is love, and is willing to forgive. The other comes from the belief that the Church is divine, and is able to absolve. These ideas are not inconsistent with one another, though they easily lead, if logically pursued, to the opposite poles of religion.

In the first case no external sign of forgiveness, no proof of validity, no miracle (in the old sense of the word) is required. God is thought of as eternally offering forgiveness, man as being brought, in a moment of penitent insight, to accept it. Once

this has been done, the weight of past sin can be treated as though it no longer existed: there is even a tendency, which has more than once been the scandal of extreme piety, to treat subsequent relapses into sin as non-existent also. The forgiven person, at any rate, stands on a special footing which almost amounts to a 'private understanding' with God.

This whole experience might be described, not inaptly, from the psychological point of view, as a process of auto-suggestion, and its efficacy in the subsequent life of the convert (which is often beyond question) as a kind of spiritual faith-cure. But, both for the individual, and for the Church, it is valid, and objective—a free gift of forgiveness and grace, which man can neither demand nor deserve. And this spiritual worth which it possesses is in no degree lessened by the natural forms of the experience under which it comes.

The other type of experience—that which rests upon belief in the Church's power of absolution—might be easily represented as an instance of a superstitious belief in miracles. And indeed, if the word of the priest were regarded as having

power in itself, apart from the disposition of the penitent, to remit sin, this would be a proper judgment. We could not reconcile it with God's character that He should remit sin where there is no intention not to sin again, or that he should connive at the use of a sacrament as an apology for an unrepentant life. Of course we do not mean that God only forgives those who, according to *our* judgment, deserve forgiveness. 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners,' says Christ. The distinction is one which man sees, but which God sees through. 'For the Lord seeth not as man seeth.' He does not treat men, in the hard language of modern philanthropy, as 'cases.' He sees in us many grounds of forgiveness that the world does not see—not only our penitence, but also our faith in God's power to forgive, our common acts of kindness, our willingness to forgive others, and our love for those who do not sin as we do. 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.' But there must be something else in the sinner besides his sin—and something which fights against his sin: otherwise it would not be possible for God to forgive him.

It may, however, be admitted that instances of the real misuse of absolution are rare. If the priest's pity for the weakness of men—a pity which is, after all, akin to God's mercy—sometimes condones a wrong use of confession, yet the aim and ideal is always to make the word of absolution (and the belief in its efficacy) really sacramental, so that it is only asked and given where there is true and proper penitence. Then the absolution becomes an assurance or guarantee (for a faith which still needs such things) of a forgiveness which is given direct by God to the soul, and which depends, for its validity, upon the degree in which there is a real sorrow for sin. There may, of course, be cases in which the state of the sinner makes it impossible that his sin, though absolved, should really have been forgiven. But the danger of delusion in the matter of forgiveness is by no means confined to the more sacramental type of experience. It belongs quite as much to the type which we were previously considering.

After all, then, the two types of experience are not very far apart from one another. Both have external forms, which are comparatively unimportant; and it is in these that they chiefly differ.

Both rest ultimately upon a belief about God ; and here they are at one. Moreover—and this is the essential point—both views would admit that the general offer of forgiveness—whether made through or apart from Church and Sacraments—is ineffective, until accepted by the faith and penitence of the individual. God's power to forgive is free, but it is not arbitrary. 'I will be gracious,' He says, 'to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy': but He has made us men the agents of His will, and the almoners of His mercy.

And now the outstanding question seems to be—what place in this experience of redemption is attributed to the Person of Christ? Certainly not a subordinate or an accidental one. If the thought of Him is admitted at all, it dominates every other. To most Christian penitents the Cross is quite central. It is not the only proof of God's love, nor the only approach to penitence and forgiveness. But it holds what is for most Christians a supreme place, and for all students of religion a very important place, because it mediates the highest and clearest

experience of redemption of which we have knowledge.

We have already had occasion to say that the sense of sin involves the need of a Saviour. And nothing that we have added as to work of faith in appropriating and interpreting the fact of the Cross is in any way meant to belittle that creative Personality without which faith would have no *raison d'être* in the world. 'Only full trust, only unconditional surrender suffice for religion. But then religion excites and commands this in a person towards a Person; a surrender to be achieved not in something, but in some one—a some one who *is* at all, only in as much as he is living, loving, growing, and to be performed, not towards something, but towards Some One, whose right, indeed whose very power to claim me, consists precisely in that He is Himself absolutely, infinitely, and actually what I am but derivatively, finitely, and potentially.'¹ This Some One—it is now quite clear—is not the untouched historical figure of Jesus upon the Cross, but the divine Christ, the eternal Saviour, seen dimly, indeed, by those who come to Him

¹ Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, i. 72.

through the written record, but fully known by those whose faith has found in Him the forgiveness of their sins.

We have not found it easy to analyse the experience of redemption in such a way as to distinguish what is essential in it from what is accidental. But this much we can now safely say—that there is a broad and important difference between the experience itself and the explanation which is given of it. The experience comes straight from our sense of what Christ was and did. It is essentially evangelical. It does not demand—though it may not be hindered by—a theological interpretation of the facts of the Gospel. It is also essentially religious. No one was ever moved to real penitence by the doctrine of absolution. The acknowledged symbol of forgiveness is the crucifix, not the confessional. The experience, then, is pure religion. On the other hand, the explanation and justification of it is the work of theology. And, although the instructed or habitual penitent may have lost the power of distinguishing between them, the theology of the transaction is on quite a different level from the religious experience.

What is the importance of this distinction? Simply this, that it is not in the experience itself, but in the official explanation of the experience that we find any objection to a non-miraculous idea of redemption.

From our analysis of the experience (apart from theological considerations) we should arrive at some such conclusions as the following: that men are sometimes in a state of mind when almost any vivid experience of life, or death, or love, or pain, will bring about a great change in their conduct and character; that the sight of helpless or undeserved suffering moves them as hardly anything else does; that even a quite uninstructed and undogmatic reading of the life and death of Jesus Christ often moves such feelings very strongly; and that this effect is indefinitely increased, for those brought up in a Christian church, by 'associations' of all kinds.

From this we should easily infer that a natural account can be given of the sense of penitence and of the fact of conversion—an account which tallies with what we observe in ourselves and others, and with the results of the psychology of religion. It is an account which we can willingly accept, without

any thought of detracting from the reality or the providential nature of the experiences concerned. And it leaves the sense of sin and forgiveness free to prove itself true in general experience, as it can very well do.

Theological interpretation, on the other hand, cannot do more than verify the soul's own title to its knowledge of God. There is even a danger that premature theological theories of sin and conversion may weaken the natural grounds and sanction of religious experience, without putting in their place anything that will bear criticism. But there *is* a place for theology, when once it is based on religious experience. The sense of sin and the experience of forgiveness are planted very deep in our nature, and afford the proper basis for any doctrine of salvation. The denominational doctrines and associations of Christianity can cultivate this sense and experience, and turn them in a particular direction. But they cannot monopolise them in the interests either of 'sudden conversion' or of 'sacramental confession.'

In other words, a proper analysis of what are sometimes regarded as the miraculous ministries of conversion and reconciliation shows that there is

nothing in their essential processes which need be beyond scientific explanation. We shall not for this reason doubt either their validity or their divine origin. The Christian is not ashamed to look for God, where the psychologist finds nothing but the association of ideas. He is rather disposed to find the proof of God's love in His condescension to ordinary methods of work, and the proof of His power in the results which He wins by means of them.

WORSHIP

Haec testimonia animae quanto vera, tanto simplicia ; quanto simplicia, tanto vulgaria ; quanto vulgaria, tanto communia ; quanto communia, tanto naturalia ; quanto naturalia, tanto divina.

TERTULLIAN, *De Test. Anim.* 5.

VI

WORSHIP

WORSHIP is a summary term for the whole attitude of man towards God, and God alone. But the readiness with which we give the word a narrower meaning shows how easily the substance of religion comes to be identified with its forms. In place of miracle-making faith, a miraculous event ; in place of deifying faith, a formulated creed ; in place of redeeming faith, a magical forgiveness ; in place of worshipping faith, an Ornaments Rubric and a Ritual Commission. Nevertheless, it is not by despising the accidents of religion, nor by ignoring its conventional forms, that a new religious principle shows its superiority, but by its power of absorbing them, and giving them a fresh significance. When Mohammed retained the Kaaba, and St. Paul the God of the Old Testament, both were following that syncretistic instinct which alone enables new

religions to make a place for themselves among the old. And it is often in externals that the real crisis lies. The accusation brought against the first liberal Christian theologian was not that he propounded a new theology, but that he said that 'this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.'¹ The same apprehension is felt to-day. It can only be met by showing that the essential forms of Christian worship, like those of Christology and Redemption, are preserved and improved by the new meaning which is put into them.

First, then, the validity of prayer follows as a direct result from the idea of God to which our inquiry has led us.

When the old belief in miracles is given up, the idea of Providence stands out with increasing clearness; and the idea of Providence—that is, of God's personal care of, and activity in, the life of the world as a whole, and of individuals in particular—involves the idea of freedom—freedom for God to work out His purposes through men, and freedom for men to choose to follow the law of their best self,

¹ Acts vi. 14.

which is the will of God. The only way, we saw, in which anything worth doing can be done in the world, is by the willing co-operation of man with the purposes of God.

But all the higher possibilities of this co-operation depend upon the intimacy of the understanding which exists between man and God. In some things, no doubt, the purposes of life are worked out through our physical nature, and through our inherited and instinctive actions, as they are through those of other animals. In other things God disposes us to do His will by way of conventional and half unconscious obedience to social demands, the necessities of living, common ideals of duty, and the ordinary influences of love, self-sacrifice, and the like. But for the highest things, and in order that He may get the best service that we can give, He needs our conscious allegiance, our deliberate attempt to learn and to do His will. And it is just here—as the normal means of intercourse and understanding between God and man—that we come upon the phenomenon of prayer.

Prayer, like many other good things in morality and religion, has childish and perhaps discreditable

origins. Even in educated times it has been put to selfish and superstitious uses. But it is so thoroughly sanctioned by the best religious experience of all times, that we cannot doubt its right of access to God. It is the typical form of expression of the religious sense, whose independence and validity are the outstanding facts of our inquiry.

Further, this independence is in no sense compromised, as we have already seen, by the scientific analysis of religious experience. The latter is applicable to prayer in just the same sense that we found it to be applicable to conversion. The discovery that psychology can analyse (to its own satisfaction) every element of a conversion, does not in the least prevent this event from being an act of God in the soul. Nor does the validity of prayer—its real contact with God—depend upon the existence of elements in it which science might admit, but could not explain. On the contrary, every sentiment and sensation of the worshipper might be measured and classified: prayer might be shown (like conversion) to be limited in its expression by what a man has read or heard, and in its experiences by what he has been taught to expect; and yet it

might be the real opening of a door between heaven and earth, and a condition, not simply of the salvation, but of the very existence of the world.

Or—to put the same thing in a different way—the efficacy of prayer can neither be proved nor disproved by such practical experiments as have sometimes been suggested—for instance, the comparison of the number of cases healed in two hospitals, one working with prayer, the other without. Such suggestions show as complete a misunderstanding of the problem as those of the Indian king who devised a series of experiments in order to discover the material properties of the soul.¹ Nothing might ever happen as the result of prayer which might not have happened equally well without it: it might be impossible to convince a believer in coincidences that a single prayer had ever been answered; and yet prayer might stand—as it indeed stands—untouched, and resting on the self-

¹ 'Le sagace roi Pāyāsi peut s'amuser à disséquer les condamnés à mort pour chercher l'âme, à les emmurer pour que leur âme ne trouve pas d'issue, à pratiquer de savantes pesées du corps vivant et du cadavre pour déterminer le poids du principe vital . . . ce sont là des enfantillages.'—POUSSIN, *Bouddhisme*, p. 68.

proof of the religious experience—a spiritual power spiritually discerned.

Here, as in some other cases, it is the religious man who finds himself protesting against the magical and superstitious view of prayer which is taken by the unbeliever. The latter thinks that prayer has failed, if the answer does not come to hand like an article from an automatic machine. But the believer in prayer (unless he be a man of very crude mind) knows better than that. He has so often failed to get what he asked from God that he has almost given up definite asking. But he knows that he has gained so very much more than he either asked or thought, in other and more intimate ways, that his life would be infinitely poorer if he gave up praying. He feels that God has taken his poor, superstitious idea of prayer and educated it: that the asking for definite things has more and more given way to the habit of putting himself entirely in God's hands, and seeking only to know and to love: that prayer is, in fact, personal communion with God. 'I have quitted all forms of devotion and set prayers,' writes Brother Lawrence, 'save those to which my state obliges me. And I make

it my only business to persevere in His Holy Presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention and an absorbing passionate regard to God, which I may call an *actual presence of God* ; or, to speak better, a silent and secret, constant intercourse of the soul with God, which often causes in me joys and raptures inwardly, and sometimes also outwardly, so great, that I am forced to use means to moderate them, and prevent their appearance to others.' ¹

We are not to suppose, then, that there is any efficacy in acts of prayer and worship as such, that they have in themselves any power to alter the course of God's will, or that, except as encouragements and expressions of communion with God, they do any good to those who use them, or to those on whose behalf they are used. God wants one thing only—our willing and enlightened service ; and the value of prayer and worship is entirely relative to that end.

If it be said, ' Service being what God asks, is not acting everything, and praying a waste of time ? ' the answer seems to be the same as in the case of penitence. Acting *is* everything ; and praying is

¹ *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 6th Letter.

a waste of time if it leads to nothing else. But we cannot act well without a right knowledge and disposition ; and these cannot generally be got without praying. 'Prayer is work,' we say, reversing the old monkish saying ; not because prayer is a fit substitute for work, where work is possible, but because it is the proper preparation for, and accompaniment of it. Prayer isolated from work may be as stupid as work isolated from prayer. Indeed, it more easily comes to be thought magical. To suppose that prayers offered at a particular place or time are more efficacious than others, or that the intercessions of a large number of people are more likely to be heard if they agree to make them on the same day, or that the answer to a prayer is in any way proportionate to the number of those who can be found to say it, is either good psychology or bad religion. The ideal is that our work for any cause should be founded upon and directed by prayer ; and most of us would do better to concentrate our prayer upon those subjects for which we can also work, than to spread it over those of which we know little or nothing, and which we cannot help in any other way.

Another objection might be raised. 'Every answer to prayer,' it is said, 'is an event which would not have happened otherwise, that is, as the natural outcome of the antecedent circumstances, apart from prayer : therefore it is a miracle.' This idea has really been excluded by our whole statement of the nature of the divine activity. Every natural event is, either by commission or by permission, an act of God. So far as science allows us, we can trace its relationship to its natural context. But, even as to its external form, science cannot say how far it has happened because of, or in spite of, or just out of relation to prayer ; still less can science gauge its possibilities of spiritual meaning, its value for faith. It may be a direct answer to prayer, and remain just as susceptible to scientific explanation as any other event. It may be a direct response of God—a genuinely new event—and yet no miracle. Nor have we any means of judging whether, if there is an answer to prayer, the event is different from what it would otherwise have been ; or whether, if there is no answer, the event may not be the same that it would have been with prayer. It is only when we assume that prayer is miraculous—when

we conceive of it as a new antecedent forcing its way in among the other antecedents of the event, and altering their natural consequences—that any difficulty arises. When once we realise that prayer is entirely personal, that it brings about a responsiveness in a man which enables God to use the normal antecedents of his life (without any miraculous interference) in an abnormal way, and to produce results of which they would otherwise have been incapable, then the difficulty disappears.

In prayer, then, as in the experience of sin and forgiveness, the surrender of the old misleading idea of miracles enables us to fall back upon a much stronger position. The independence of the religious experience frees us from the supposed disproofs of the efficacy of prayer, and the validity of the religious judgment puts the practice of prayer, when rid of some trammels of superstition, upon a basis which is unassailable. In doing this, we are in no sense surrendering the objective validity of prayer. We are only giving expression to the fact that it is limited, in its immediate method of working, to its reaction upon the characters of those who pray. We believe that it thus becomes one of the

highest forms of that communion of will between God and man which alone enables God (by His own free choice) to do His work in the world. 'Worship,' says Dr. Rashdall, 'must consist in the effort of the human spirit to identify itself with the divine—not in mystical, self-destroying unity, but in the directions of its desires, its aspirations, its will. Formal worship, public or private, can be only a means of bringing about this conformity of the will, and therefore of the life, to God's will. . . . Upon the state of our souls and our wills depends the character of our lives, and the course of events in the world outside us. Prayer, therefore, must be effectual.'¹

It is not possible to deal here with the whole question of sacraments. But it is worth while to point out the main bearing of our principles upon the common experience of sacramental worship—especially in the case of Holy Communion.

We must first clear our minds of what may be called the *fallacy of discreditable origins*. It is probably true that early Christianity won its way into the world almost, if not quite as much by the elements

¹ *Doctrine and Development*, p. 18.

which it borrowed from Greek and Oriental cults, as by those which it inherited from Judaism; that it was commonly regarded, in the words of a recent writer, 'as a superior form of "mystery Religion."' ¹ And it was in the sacramental doctrine of the Church that these elements came to a head. But it ought not to need stating again—we have seen it already in the case of prayer—that an institution is to be judged, not by what it once was, but by what it has become. The sacramental tradition of Church worship has been too continuous and varied for us to doubt that it represents a genuine religious experience, and one quite central to a large proportion of Christians.

What is the nature of that experience? Sacramentalism is a mode of worship which represents spiritual things under material forms. In a general sense, all worship must be sacramental, in so far as it makes use of words and ceremonies. But that kind of religion is sacramental in a special sense which regards this mode of presenting spiritual things, not simply with toleration, but with enthusiasm; and which strongly, or even exclusively,

¹ Lake, *Earlier Epistles of S. Paul*, p. 45. —

associates certain rites with participation in certain spiritual benefits, so that they become, in the words of the Church catechism, 'a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof.' When we go below these phrases, and ask what is the actual nature of the sacramental experience, we find, I think, two constituents in it, corresponding to the two words 'means' and 'pledge.' For, in the first place, it is the unanimous opinion of those who use sacraments that they are an actual means of grace; and this experience can be found among people who hold very different opinions as to the nature and relative importance of particular sacraments. And secondly, the main element in the sacramental experience is the feeling of certainty which, rightly or wrongly, this kind of worship carries with it. Based partly on the psychological fact of the association of ideas, and partly on the primitive religious tendency towards symbolic representations of the deity, this feeling has come to characterise some of the highest types of spiritual life. We feel more sure of the divine blessing upon marriage and ordination if it is associated with a ceremonial joining or laying on of

hands : we are more certain that Christ is present among us when He is presented, it may be with all the resources of music and ritual, under the forms of bread and wine. I am not trying to justify these experiences, still less to condemn them ; I am only saying that they exist, and that they have to be taken into account, as belonging to the essence of sacraments. Indeed, the difference between the sacramentalist and other men does not lie in the fact that he uses sacraments, but in the way in which he uses them. And so generally in religion. The important lines of division do not run according to particular rites, or even beliefs, but according to religious temperament. The epigram which says that there are only two religions, Roman Catholicism and Quakerism, is not far from the truth.

But there is more. The sacrament is not only a means and a pledge. It is also an act of intercourse or communion between God and man, in which God's grace, or the power of divine life, is, as a matter of actual experience, imparted to man. ' For,' as Richard Hooker says, ' we take not baptism nor the eucharist for bare *resemblances* or memorials of things absent, neither for *naked signs* and testi-

monies assuring us of grace received before, but (as they are in deed and in verity) a means effectual whereby God, when we take the sacraments, delivereth into our hands that grace available unto eternal life, which grace the sacraments represent or signify.’¹ And again, of the Eucharist in particular, ‘It is on all sides plainly confessed . . . that this sacrament is a true and real participation of Christ, who thereby imparteth himself, even His whole entire Person, *as a mystical Head*, into every soul that receiveth Him, and that every such receiver doth thereby incorporate or unite himself unto Christ as a *mystical member* of Him, yea of them also whom He acknowledgeth to be His own.’² There is, no doubt, in this statement of the case, a theological element, which is not part of the actual experience of communion, but which has been read into it. Nevertheless, the sense of the nearness of God, and of the reality of the soul’s communion with Him, is undoubtedly essential to the higher forms of the sacramental experience, and is just as real as any of our lower and commoner experiences.

Not only are these experiences real : they are also

¹ *Eccles. Pol.* v. 57. 5.

² *Ibid.* v. 67. 7.

intelligible—that is, they can be analysed and studied by psychology in the same way that other experiences can be. Whether or not they have been so thoroughly investigated and explained as, for instance, the ordinary emotions of anger, fear, and the like, or the mental states of the insane, makes little difference. We do not doubt that they can be treated in the same way ; we do not doubt that they will some day be explained to the satisfaction of the psychologist. They do not necessarily involve any miraculous or permanently mysterious element. And what we are concerned to point out is that religion does not ask that it should be otherwise ; that it has nothing to fear from the psychological explanation of religious experiences ; that revelation does not work at cross purposes with reason, nor divine grace antagonise human freedom ; but that the most intimate motions of God's love, and the fullest communications of His will, are expressed in just those experiences of the soul, in prayer, and sacraments, and the practice of goodness, which are most open to the light of common day.

The profound truths of vitalism are still regarded with suspicion by religion. We have only been

willing, as yet, to admit the romanticism of common things when they are touched by religion. We have tended to regard the divine element, not as naturally present in ordinary events, but as imported into them by an act of faith from outside, and, therefore, as something not intelligible to ordinary experience, something (ultimately) rather arbitrary and artificial. Religion thus becomes an interesting attitude, which the few who are naturally liable to it cannot avoid, and which the many may adopt if they feel so inclined. But that is not enough. We want to show that religion is inevitable, for any man who is fully a man—that not to the visionary only, and not by a rare act of faith, but to the eye of science, when it is truly scientific, and to any proper interpretation of common experience,

‘Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God.’

There is a place for romanticism in religion, because we must believe in the divine possibilities of the world; but it must be thoroughly vitalistic, finding that what things ought to be is implicit and active in what they are. Loyalty to ‘historical facts’ excludes the old idea of miracles, with its many

disastrous consequences in Christology, in soteriology, in prayer, in sacraments, and elsewhere. But, by doing so, it gives a fresh significance to these old doctrines and practices of religion. In all of them the essential experiences can be re-expressed in forms which, just because they hold closer to the old truths which Christian experience has never lost, can open up a new world of religion.

It is a little sad to come down from the mount of vision, and to return into a world where 'the people sit down to eat and to drink, and rise up to play.' But it is right that faith should be required to measure itself by facts. We have perhaps been too easy in our dismissal of old ideas, too hopeful in our suggestion of new ones. It is good for us to be reminded that our vision, however divinely carved in tables of stone, has somehow to become a definite code of belief and conduct for a number of quite ordinary people.

When we look at the Church as it is, and speculate about its future, we may easily be discouraged. It seems to be encamped in a wilderness which gives very little security for its comfort, or even for its

continued existence. It is uncertain from what country it has come out, or to what country it is going. There is indeed plenty of life and stir among us. There is even 'a noise of war in the camp.' But, if it is not 'the voice of them that cry for being overcome'—if the Church is holding its own, or even making real spiritual progress in the world—yet 'it is not the voice of them that shout for mastery'—there is not that confidence or unanimity in its cry which strikes terror into the heart of sin and untruth.

Without attempting to analyse the whole situation, let me mention one prominent feature in it. The Church ought by no means to be satisfied with the part which it plays in the daily life and interests of the nation. It is a grand thing that the gospel of repentance, and the sacraments of the Church, should be showing their old power to redeem and transform the lives of people in the slums. It is a most hopeful sign that the social conscience of the middle class, and its instincts of government, should be trying to ally themselves with Christian ethics, and with a reverence for the character of Christ. Much that is beautiful and saintly comes from

the spread of catholic ritual and devotion among many women and some men of the upper class. But this is not enough. How can the Church be satisfied, whilst it has so little real hold over the commercial life of the nation, or over its professional standards and ideals? What kind of allegiance does it get from business men as a whole? or from the great mass of our doctors, lawyers, artists, authors, and politicians? Do we not tacitly assume their indifference—not to Christ, not even to Christianity, but to the specific claims of the Church? And this indifference cannot be attributed simply to the business of modern life, or to its materialism, or to its artificiality. It results largely from no more abstruse causes than experience of life, and the growth of a way of regarding the world, and a method of dealing with it, which is out of sympathy with conventional churchmanship.

We may put the case in another way. Of the men who come up to an Oxford college, and who have been regular church-goers and communicants at school, it is admitted that quite half cease to be such directly they are free to do as they like.

Amongst those who do not have a public school and university education the proportion is probably much higher. What this means is that in England, when Christians grow up, they cease to be churchmen. That is the quite simple fact ; and those of us who have to deal with people who are growing up know that it is so. Further, much as we may regret the loss of the habit and atmosphere of worship, yet we must admit that, as things are, the break with the past is almost inevitable. The set of forms which expresses the needs of the boy can hardly express the needs of the man. The Church could only keep a firm hold upon young people by the use of an authority which would cripple freedom, or by an appeal to the emotions of adolescence which would degrade reason. We hold, in fact, that the parts of a man's religion which, whether they are orthodox or unorthodox, make him most a man, and therefore most like God, are those which he has thought out and lived out for himself.

It seems to follow that the only church capable of holding the allegiance of the present generation will be one which combines strong and simple principles

with great flexibility of form. Probably all parties are agreed upon this, except the few extremists who either deny the possibility of the Church changing its forms of belief and worship, or who refuse to recognise the necessity of any set of forms at all. So that the present controversies about the limits of toleration, and of the expression of belief within the Church, are more a matter of adjustment than of principle.

Nevertheless, there is, behind our smaller disagreements, a very fundamental difference between what I may call a backward-looking and a forward-looking idea of Christianity. The one conceives the Church mainly as growing out of a past; the other mainly as growing into a future. The one has definite views as to what it can or cannot become, because of what it has been; the other thinks that what it has been may be interesting as a matter of history, but cannot be used to test or limit its present and future development. The former finds the regulative principle of development in the past, the latter in the future; the former in historical facts, the latter in spiritual ideals.

The strength of the English Church lies in its

recognition of both these points of view : the complete predominance of either would, no doubt, be disastrous. But the difficulties of the present situation will not be cleared up without a very rigorous examination both of the historical elements of Christianity, and also of the typical Christian experience, in order that we may become more agreed than we are at present as to what parts of each are essential, and what parts accidental. Otherwise one suspects that some of the things which the backward-looking view wants to keep are quite unessential, and that some, which the forward-looking view wishes to abolish, may be fundamental.

Criticism, then, must go forward, and so must the psychology of religion, unhindered. And no really essential or final steps must be taken, as regards the limits of belief in our Church, or as regards its reunion with other churches, until these points are more fully cleared up. Attempts at restatement and reconstruction of belief there may very well be, because each generation ought to be able to give an account of its own position, looking both to the past and to the future. But we shall

not pretend to do more than guess at the final synthesis of faith and fact.

Meanwhile, any attempt to limit free inquiry, either by a critical theory which puts certain historical facts above historical proof or disproof, or by a theory of Church discipline which penalises those whose free inquiries do not arrive at certain conclusions, must inevitably widen the already serious breach between the Church and the nation. Our people are becoming educated. They are growing more impatient of those who merely dogmatise to them. They want above all to hold with Christ, and to keep reason at their side. But, if they cannot have reason, they will not very long hold with Christ. The Church stands for two great and indispensable things—for the continuity of that faith which we have seen to be the ground alike of Providence, Christology, redemption, and worship, and for that variety of religious experiences which alone is able to secure universality and objectivity for the Church's judgment. A church which becomes a conspiracy to uphold a fixed doctrine is no longer doing its proper work, that is, to provide a soil and an atmosphere in which every spiritual

capacity of man may come to its full growth. The time is coming—indeed, it is already here—when the Church will have to choose between two courses, either to save its life, or to lose it : to save it at the cost of becoming an interesting and beautiful survival ; or to lose it in giving birth to the national religion of the future.

In conclusion, it may be well to point out some ways in which, in the practical Christian life, we can all work towards the solution which we desire.

First, we can believe in, and try to practise, the intellectual virtues, as well as the moral—and, more particularly the Christian virtue of truthfulness, which means a thorough and sincere attempt to be true, not only in word, but also in thought. There is great vagueness, even amongst educated people, as to the principles and grounds of belief. We have left unbelieved things which we ought to have believed : we have believed things which we ought not to have believed : and there is too little respect for truth in us. We need to remind ourselves very seriously of our responsibility for our beliefs. On the one hand, where we may rightly believe, we should

believe with all our might. On the other hand, 'it is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence; and where it is presumption to doubt and to investigate, there it is worse than presumption to believe.'¹

Secondly, we need, as much as we ever did, to fight against all kinds of superstition—against superstitious elements and beliefs in theology, in Christology, in the forgiveness of sins, in prayer, in sacraments, and even in that which is commonly contrasted with all these, namely morality. The cruder forms of magic have gone—at least, as far as Bond Street; but the spirit of it remains, and is always trying to force an entrance again into our Christian religion.

Thirdly, we need a far deeper and stronger faith in the truth that God is Spirit, in the reality of spiritual things, and in the supremacy of spiritual values. We can learn it from our Lord Himself; we can learn it from the Eastern world, to which He belonged as much as to the Western; and we can learn it from the Christian saints and mystics of all ages.

¹ Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief*.

Lastly, we need to believe much more thoroughly than we do in the divinity of common life, and in the nearness of God to man. What was true of the simple apostles who first preached Christianity to the Greek world, is also true of the ordinary events and faculties through which God reveals Himself to a world still hungry for miracles—‘God chose the foolish things of the world, that He might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that He might put to shame the things that are strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised, did God choose, yea, and the things that are not, that He might bring to nought the things that are.’

If God orders nature and mind in ways that science can discover and describe; if He works out His purpose for the world through our free activity; if He leads men to His service through the sense of sin, and the assurance of forgiveness; if He reveals His will to them in prayer, and communicates Himself to them in the sacraments; if, above all, the supreme means and sign of His presence in the world, and of His redeeming love towards mankind,

was a human life and death—if ‘ God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself ’—then no miracle can make us more sure that our religion is true and real ; and, so long as we are faithful to what is highest and best in ourselves and in the world, nothing ‘ shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’

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